

RISE HANDBOOK

HOW TO CREATE A SAFE SPORT ENVIRONMENT WHICH VALUES ATHLETES AS HUMAN BEINGS



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HOW TO CREATE A SAFE AND HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT WHICH VALUES ATHLETES AS HUMAN BEINGS



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AUTHOR

Dr. Tatiana Chalkidou

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How to create a Safe and Healthy environment which values athletes as human beings

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Handbook

The purpose of this Handbook is to explore and present strategies for creating a safe and healthy sports environment that not only prioritizes the physical and mental well-being of athletes but also values them as human beings. This handbook is specifically focused on the prevention of sexual violence in sports and is a key deliverable of the RISE team under this Erasmus+ project aimed at fostering safety and respect in athletic environments across Europe. Through the collaborative efforts of the RISE Consortium, this handbook addresses the multifaceted nature of violence, particularly sexual violence, in sports. It provides practical recommendations for coaches, sports organizations, and policymakers to implement long-lasting, systemic changes. These changes will ensure that athletes, regardless of age, gender, or level of competition, are protected from harm and supported in reaching their full potential as individuals and professionals.

Sexual violence in sports is a pervasive and deeply rooted issue that affects individuals across all levels of athletic participation. It undermines the integrity of sports environments, disrupts the development of trust, and significantly compromises the safety and well-being of participants (Gaedicke et al., 2021; Wagner & Rulofs, 2023). In particular, sexual violence in sports is a deeply ingrained issue that often goes unaddressed due to a combination of systemic, cultural, and organizational factors, with systemic and structural power imbalances within sports organizations creating environments that enable such misconduct (Fasting & Brackenridge, 2009). Factors such as isolation, hierarchical structures, and entrenched systemic issues further heighten the risk of abuse in sports settings (Roberts et al., 2020) whereas power dynamics between coaches and athletes, as well as peer-to-peer relationships within teams, can create environments where abuse and exploitation occur. The insidious nature of these dynamics, coupled with a lack of robust safeguarding mechanisms, allows for instances of abuse to be overlooked, normalized, or even silenced.

The goal of this handbook, developed by the RISE team, is to challenge the status quo by promoting a holistic approach to athlete welfare that recognizes and actively works to prevent all forms of abuse —especially sexual violence— while fostering a culture of respect, transparency, and care. Through the collaborative efforts of the RISE Consortium, this handbook aims to support the creation of safer and more inclusive environments for athletes across Europe. As such, it can be argued that the significance of this handbook lies not only in its emphasis on preventing sexual violence but also in its broader objective of reimagining the values that underpin sports environments. Traditionally, sports have been framed around performance, achievement, and competition, often to the detriment of the athletes' well-being. In such environments, athletes' physical and emotional needs are sometimes

overlooked in the pursuit of success. Furthermore, this handbook challenges that paradigm by advocating for a shift towards an athlete-centered model, where human rights, dignity, and mental health of athletes are prioritized alongside their physical performance. A safe and healthy sports environment, as conceptualized in this handbook, is one where all participants—athletes, coaches, staff, and administrators—are actively engaged in creating a culture of mutual respect and ethical behavior. This environment requires more than just preventing harm; it calls for proactive measures to ensure that athletes feel valued and supported in all aspects of their personal and professional lives. This includes providing access to mental health resources, fostering open communication, promoting positive coaching practices, and ensuring that athletes have a voice in decisions that affect their well-being and careers. Therefore, efforts to prevent sexual violence in sports must prioritize both individual and systemic change. Helping behaviors can take proactive forms, such as seeking knowledge about sexual violence, or reactive forms, such as intervening in high-risk situations (McMahon & Banyard, 2012) and effective prevention also requires robust policies, clear and accessible reporting mechanisms, and stringent enforcement to ensure accountability and deter misconduct (Parent & Demers, 2011).

In addition, as a deliverable for this Erasmus+ project on preventing sexual violence in sports, this handbook will serve as a guide for stakeholders across Europe to implement tangible changes in their own sports environments. Leadership is pivotal in fostering awareness, promoting engagement in prevention initiatives, and setting a tone of accountability across organizations (Banyard, 2014). The recommendations provided will be based on evidence from research and best practices identified through collaborative work with sports organizations, athletes, and advocacy groups within the RISE Consortium. The handbook also emphasizes the importance of continuous education, training, and monitoring to ensure that any policies or protocols adopted remain effective over time. Tailored education and training for all stakeholders—including coaches, medical staff, athletes, and policymakers—are critical to establishing a culture of safety and accountability (Parent & Demers, 2011). Ultimately, the purpose of this handbook is not only to address the immediate issue of sexual violence in sports but also to spark a wider conversation about the values that underpin sports culture. By treating athletes as whole individuals, rather than solely as competitors, we can create an environment where they are empowered to thrive—physically, mentally, and emotionally—while safeguarding their dignity and human rights. This is the core mission of the Erasmus+ project and the guiding principle of this handbook. Through the insights and recommendations provided, this handbook aims to contribute to the development of sports environments that are safe, supportive, and inclusive for all athletes, in alignment with the work of the RISE Consortium.

1.2 Background and Need for Safe Sports Environments

Overview of the Prevalence of Sexual Violence in Sports

Sexual violence in sports is a pervasive issue that affects athletes across all levels, from amateur to professional, and spans both genders and age groups. Despite the recognized benefits of sport, harassment and abuse remain significant concerns. Studies have shown that these issues are prevalent across all levels of sport, with elite, disabled, child, and LGBTQ+ athletes being at higher risk (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Mountjoy et al., 2022; Mountjoy & Verhagen, 2022). For instance, a UK study revealed that 29% of youth athletes experienced sexual harassment, while 3% reported sexual abuse before the age of 16 (Mountjoy et al., 2022). Similarly, a retrospective survey of 4000 Belgian and Dutch athletes found that 44% experienced some form of harassment or abuse during their youth athletic careers (Mountjoy & Verhagen, 2022). Despite the ethos of discipline, teamwork, and integrity often associated with sports, many athletic environments' competitive and hierarchical nature can foster power imbalances that increase vulnerability to abuse. Numerous high-profile cases in recent years have brought attention to the widespread nature of sexual violence in sports, shining a light on a problem that has historically been under handled or even silenced. These cases have shown that sexual abuse and misconduct often thrive in environments where trust, loyalty, and control are manipulated by those in power, including coaches, trainers, or even peers.

The prevalence of harassment and abuse in sports is often perpetuated by systemic issues, such as power imbalances, lack of accountability, and inadequate reporting mechanisms (Kerr et al., 2019; MacPherson et al., 2022). Sports settings frequently involve unique risk factors, such as close-knit relationships, intense physical contact, and isolated training environments, and these conditions can make younger athletes particularly vulnerable and often reluctant to report abuse due to fear of retribution, loss of playing time, or damage to their careers. This normalization often contributes to athletes' confusion about boundaries, making it difficult for them to recognize and report misconduct. In some cases, athletes may not fully understand that they are being abused due to a lack of education on what constitutes appropriate behavior. For instance, physical contact between coaches and child athletes, a routine part of professional responsibilities, can blur the lines between appropriate and abusive behavior. This gray area is suggested to be highly problematic and may contribute to underreporting and lead to lower prevalence estimates ranging from 2% to 8% (Parent & Hlimi, 2012). Studies suggest that female athletes and children are particularly vulnerable, although male athletes are also significantly affected by sexual violence in sports, especially in environments where toxic masculinity and homophobia are prevalent.

The Role of Sport Organizations in Prevention

Creating a safe and healthy environment requires the collective efforts of various stakeholders, including athletes, coaches, sports organizations, and policymakers. Athletes have the right to participate in sports in a safe and enjoyable environment, and their voices

should be central to the development and implementation of safeguarding initiatives (Mountjoy et al., 2022; Willson et al., 2022). Given their influence over the culture and policies within their respective sports, organizations are uniquely positioned to establish and enforce standards that protect athletes from abuse. However, as identified by the RISE team in collaboration with various stakeholders, many sports organizations have fallen short in their efforts to address this issue, often reacting to crises rather than proactively implementing protective measures. Through this Erasmus+ project, the RISE Consortium aims to support organizations adopting a more proactive and comprehensive approach to safeguarding athletes. Furthermore, it can be argued that prevention begins with acknowledging the prevalence of sexual violence in sports and recognizing the need for comprehensive, institution-wide reforms. Sports organizations must establish clear policies and guidelines that define what constitutes sexual misconduct, harassment, and abuse (Gurgis et al., 2022; Walton et al., 2021). These policies should be accompanied by robust mechanisms that ensure confidentiality and protect whistleblowers from retaliation. A critical element of prevention is creating a culture where athletes feel safe to speak out about misconduct without fear of losing their place on the team or damaging their reputation.

In addition, training and education are essential tools for prevention, as emphasized by the RISE team in this Erasmus+ project. Coaches and sports organizations must also play a crucial role by establishing and enforcing safeguarding policies, providing education, and fostering a culture of respect and equity (Gurgis et al., 2022; Walton et al., 2021). Sports organizations should mandate regular training for coaches, staff, and athletes on recognizing and preventing sexual violence. This training should cover appropriate boundaries, power dynamics, and the long-term psychological and physical impacts of abuse, whereas education should not be limited to identifying warning signs but also include fostering respectful relationships, emphasizing consent, and promoting mental health resources for athletes who have experienced trauma. Moreover, sports organizations need to implement and enforce stringent background checks for all personnel who work with athletes, particularly those in positions of power or trust. Coaches and staff should be held to the highest ethical standards, and any individual with a history of abusive behavior should be barred from working with athletes. Monitoring systems, such as anonymous surveys or third-party audits, can be employed to ensure compliance with safeguarding policies and detect any gaps in Safeguarding.

Furthermore, a significant aspect of prevention involves building a supportive and transparent environment. Organizations must cultivate an athlete-centered approach, where the well-being and rights of athletes are prioritized over winning or financial gain. This includes regular communication between athletes and leadership, fostering a culture of accountability, and ensuring that athletes have access to mental health services and support systems, as advocated by the RISE team through their collaborative efforts. Overall, sports organizations have both an ethical and legal obligation to protect athletes from sexual violence. Through comprehensive policies, education, and a commitment to changing the

culture of silence, these organizations can create environments where athletes are safe, respected, and valued as human beings. Prevention is not only about addressing misconduct when it happens but about fostering a proactive, ongoing commitment to the health and safety of all participants in sport.

1.3 Target Audience

Multiple stakeholders must be involved in the process to create a safe and healthy sports environment that values athletes as human beings. The issue of sexual violence in sports, along with the broader need to safeguard athlete well-being, touches on many aspects of sports culture and requires the active participation of sports organizations, clubs, coaches, athletes, parents, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Each group plays a crucial role in both the prevention of sexual violence and the promotion of an athlete-centered approach to sports management. The RISE team emphasizes the importance of collaboration across these groups to implement long-lasting changes, and this section details the specific responsibilities and contributions of each target audience in creating safer sports environments.

Sport Organizations

Sports organizations, such as national governing bodies, federations, and international sports councils, are at the top of the hierarchy in the sports ecosystem. They have a unique capacity to set the tone for how sexual violence is addressed and athlete safety is prioritized. These organizations are responsible for drafting and enforcing policies that dictate the standards of behavior for all those involved in sports, from the grassroots level to elite international competitions. As such, key responsibilities for sports organizations include:

- ǒ **Policy Development:** Establishing clear guidelines on what constitutes sexual violence, harassment, and abuse, and setting up zero-tolerance policies. These guidelines should also include procedures for handling misconduct and complaints in a manner that ensures the safety and privacy of athletes.
- ǒ **Education and Training:** Mandating regular training for all members—coaches, staff, and athletes—on safeguarding and sexual violence prevention.
- ǒ **Monitoring and Accountability:** Creating oversight mechanisms to ensure that clubs and teams comply with policies related to athlete safety. This could involve conducting audits, anonymous surveys, and offering external evaluations.

Furthermore, sports organizations must also engage in public campaigns that emphasize the importance of athlete well-being and challenge the stigma around speaking out against abuse. Their leadership can foster a culture where safeguarding is a top priority, sending a clear message that athlete health and dignity cannot be compromised.

Sports Clubs

Local and regional sports clubs serve as the primary interaction point for most athletes, particularly in youth and amateur sports, and these clubs are often where athletes build

foundational skills and relationships with coaches and peers. As such, they have a critical role in creating a positive and safe environment. As such, key responsibilities include:

- ǒ **Implementation of Safeguarding Policies:** Ensuring that all club members are aware of the safeguarding protocols established by sport governing bodies. In addition, clubs must also have clear, easy-to-access mechanisms for athletes and staff to document inappropriate behavior or misconduct.
- ǒ **Training and Support:** Clubs should organize regular training sessions on appropriate boundaries, consent, and recognizing the signs of abuse. Club leaders must also provide resources for mental health support and professional counselling when needed.
- ǒ **Fostering a Safe Culture:** Clubs should create a positive, inclusive culture where all athletes feel valued as individuals, not just for their athletic performance. This means encouraging open dialogue about personal well-being and ensuring that all athletes—regardless of gender, age, or ability—are treated with respect.

Coaches

Coaches are often seen as role models and authority figures in an athlete's life, making them key to creating a safe and respectful environment. Unfortunately, the significant power imbalance that exists between coaches and athletes can be manipulated, leading to situations of abuse. Therefore, coaches must adhere to the highest standards of ethical behavior and responsibility. As such, they should:

- ǒ **Establish Professional Boundaries:** Coaches must maintain professional, respectful relationships with their athletes by setting clear boundaries to avoid situations where inappropriate or exploitative behavior can occur.
- ǒ **Participate in Regular Training:** Coaches must undergo regular training to stay informed about safeguarding protocols, sexual violence prevention, and how to create emotionally supportive environments. This training should focus on understanding power dynamics and preventing abuse of authority.
- ǒ **Create an Athlete-Centered Approach:** Coaches should focus on the holistic development of their athletes, considering their emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. This includes fostering an open-door policy where athletes feel comfortable discussing personal issues or concerns.
- ǒ **Lead by Example:** Coaches have the power to shape team culture. By promoting respect, empathy, and professionalism, they can help establish an environment where sexual violence and misconduct are openly condemned.

Athletes

Athletes themselves are at the core of this discussion, and empowering them to understand their rights and voice their concerns is essential to preventing sexual violence. In addition, athletes, particularly younger or less experienced ones, may feel powerless to challenge inappropriate behavior, which is why education and support systems are critical. As such, their key responsibilities include:

- ǒ **Be Educated on Their Rights:** Athletes need to be informed about what constitutes sexual violence and harassment, and how they can protect themselves from abusive situations. Education campaigns within sports organizations and clubs should focus on ensuring that athletes understand they have the right to speak out if they feel uncomfortable or violated.
- ǒ **Speak Up Against Misconduct:** Athletes should be encouraged to voice any form of misconduct, whether they experience it themselves or witness it happening to others.
- ǒ **Participate in Creating a Positive Culture:** Athletes play a crucial role in shaping their team's culture by fostering peer respect, offering support to fellow teammates, and promoting inclusivity. These actions not only strengthen team cohesion but also contribute to a positive and healthy environment for everyone involved.

Parents

Parents are often the first line of defense in safeguarding young athletes, particularly in youth sports. They have a responsibility to be involved in their children's athletic lives, ensuring that the environments in which their children participate are safe and supportive. Therefore, their key responsibilities include:

- ǒ **Be Vigilant:** Parents should remain vigilant about the relationships their children develop with coaches and teammates. Maintaining open and regular communication with their child about their sports experiences is essential, as it can help identify and address any potential concerns at an early stage.
- ǒ **Educate Themselves on Safeguarding:** Parents should educate themselves on the signs of abuse and sexual violence in sports and know the appropriate steps to take if they suspect misconduct. They should also be familiar with the safeguarding policies of the clubs and organizations where their child participates.
- ǒ **Support Their Child's Well-Being:** Parents should prioritize their child's mental and emotional well-being over competitive success. This means supporting open discussions about consent, boundaries, and personal safety.

Policymakers

Policymakers at the national and local levels play a significant role in establishing a legal framework for safeguarding athletes as they are responsible for crafting legislation that protects athletes and ensures that sports organizations are held accountable for preventing and addressing sexual violence. Key responsibilities include:

- ǒ **Enforce Legislation:** Create and enforce laws that require sports organizations and clubs to implement safeguarding measures, such as background checks for coaches and mandatory training on sexual violence prevention.
- ǒ **Ensure Funding for Safeguarding Initiatives:** Provide financial support for programs and initiatives aimed at preventing sexual violence in sports, including educational campaigns, research, and mental health services.
- ǒ **Monitor Compliance:** Set up monitoring bodies to ensure that sports organizations are complying with national safeguarding standards and policies.

Other Stakeholders

Other stakeholders, including sponsors, media, and sports fans, can also influence the culture of safety and respect in sports. Sponsors, for instance, should align themselves with sports organizations that demonstrate commitment to athlete welfare. In addition to the above, the media can play a role in raising awareness about the importance of safe sports environments and holding organizations accountable. Overall, preventing sexual violence and creating a safe, respectful sports environment requires a coordinated effort from all these target audiences, as highlighted by the RISE team and the RISE Consortium emphasizes that this collective approach is essential in addressing the multifaceted nature of sexual violence in sports. By working together, sports organizations, clubs, coaches, athletes, parents, policymakers, and other stakeholders can foster a culture that values athletes not only for their abilities but also as human beings deserving of safeguarding, respect, and dignity. The RISE team underscores the importance of building trust, accountability, and open communication within sports environments, ensuring that every individual is empowered to uphold safety and well-being. Through this unified effort, the sports community can work towards systemic, long-term change, creating environments where athletes feel valued, supported, and protected from harm at all levels of competition.

2. Understanding Sexual Violence in Sports

Definition and Types of Sexual Violence

This glossary serves as a vital resource to better understand the various terms associated with sexual violence in sports and its related forms. Sexual violence is a pervasive issue that disproportionately affects women and individuals of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations within athletic environments. It encompasses a wide range of harmful behaviors, including physical, psychological, and sexual violence, and can manifest in various settings, such as training facilities, competitions, and social events. The terms defined herein include critical concepts like physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, and their subcategories, such as rape, sexual harassment, and stalking. Each definition elucidates the complexity of these behaviors and highlights the various contexts in which they occur within sports. The glossary also addresses the distinctions between terms like "victim" and "survivor," emphasizing the importance of language in understanding the experiences of those affected. Furthermore, this glossary outlines the specific forms of violence that can occur in sports, such as grooming, and digital harassment, providing clarity on the legal and social implications of these actions. Understanding these terms is essential for fostering awareness, promoting education, and advocating for justice in the face of sexual violence in sports.

Gender-based violence is any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their actual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Gender-based violence affects women disproportionately (Council of Europe, 2019).

Physical violence is a type of violence where a person (or group of people) uses part of their body or an object to hurt someone else, or to take control of a victim. Psychological violence (sometimes known as emotional violence) - a type of violence, where a person (or group of people) intentionally uses coercion and threats leading to fear, enabling them to gain control over another person or group of people (Council of Europe, 2019).

Psychological violence often precedes or accompanies physical and sexual violence in intimate relationships (domestic violence). However, it may also occur in any other type of setting, for example in the workplace or school environment (Council of Europe, 2019).

Sexual violence is any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object (WHO, 2006).

Victim / Survivor is a person who has experienced violence. While the terms victim and survivor are sometimes used interchangeably, victim is more often used in the legal and medical sectors, while survivor is the term of choice in the psychological and social support sectors, as it implies resilience (EU-GBV survey, 2021).

FORMS/TYPES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

***** Note: Sometimes legal terms vary from the terms used for psychological or/and social support.**

Attempted rape is an act of sexual violence in which a person attempts to have sexual intercourse with another person by threatening them (verbally or with a weapon), by using physical force, or by putting that person in a situation in which they cannot say no or comply out of fear. However, sexual intercourse does not occur. (Current partner violence, Former partner violence, Non-partner violence) (EU-GBV survey, 2021).

Catcalling - The term 'catcalling' refers to a subcategory of street harassment behaviour; catcalls may be verbal or non-verbal, directed at strangers in public, typically from men to women, that is frequently about the recipient's appearance or that is sexual in nature and do not include stalking or physical contact. Definitions of catcalling include behaviours such as name-calling, propositioning, whistling, leering, winking, gesturing, and/or using signs to rate physical appearance (Walton et al, 2021).

Date rape (alternative term: Intimate Partner Sexual Violence) - sexual activity that is non-consensual and coerced by someone the victim knows and is involved in a romantic or potentially romantic relationship with. Date rape is sometimes forced by adding a sedative drug to a victim's drink to make them unconscious, so the person does not resist sexual activity (Council of Europe, 2019).

Digital harassment and abuse are an umbrella term referring to a range of harmful interpersonal behaviours experienced via a range of online platforms, as well as via mobile

phones and other electronic communication devices (including tablets and online gaming consoles). It can include both non-criminal and criminal behaviours ([Powell and Henry, 2017](#)). Examples of non-criminal behaviours include name-calling, offensive language, and sexual harassment, while criminal behaviours can include image-based sexual abuse (for example, taking, distributing, or threatening to distribute nude or sexual images without consent, which is increasingly criminalized in many jurisdictions globally, see [Powell and Henry, 2017](#)), threats of physical harm, and cyberstalking. Note: more terms related to digital harassment and abuse at [Digital harassment and abuse: Experiences of sexuality and gender minority adults - Anastasia Powell, Adrian J Scott, Nicola Henry, 2020 \(sagepub.com\)](#)

Female genital mutilation (FGM) comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons (WHO).

Grooming Using a long-term method of creating a personal relationship with the athlete to reinforce power and control and alienate the athlete from their support systems (Winters, Kaylor & Jeglic, 2021).

Image-based sexual abuse (alternative Degrading Sexual Imagery) refers to the taking or sharing of nude or sexual photographs or videos of another person without their consent. It includes a diversity of behaviours such as the secret trading of nude or sexual images online; "upskirting", "downblousing" and other "creepshots"; blackmail or "sextortion" scams; the use of artificial intelligence to construct "deepfake" pornographic videos; threats to distribute photographs and videos without consent; and the taking or sharing of sexual assault imagery (Henry et al, 2021).

Indecent Exposure Indecent exposure is the deliberate act of exposing private parts of the body in an offensive manner, in a public space. People of all genders and bodies can be victims of indecent exposure and can be perpetrators of indecent exposure. Indecent exposure can occur in class, at the library, or on the streets of Peterborough. You need to have consent before exposing and sharing your intimate body parts with others. This DOES NOT include breastfeeding parents (Source: [Indecent Exposure - Sexual Violence - Trent University](#)). Examples: 'Cyber flashing' and 'dick pics' Source: [Types of sexual violence | Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)).

Rape - nonconsensual sexual activity usually involving sexual intercourse or another form of penetration, committed using physical force, coercion or an abuse of authority. Causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person can also constitute rape. A rape victim may be conscious or unconscious, and the perpetrator(s) may be a person or group of people known to the victim, or they may be strangers (Council of Europe, 2019).

Sexual abuse - Sexual abuse is the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. Sexual exploitation and abuse

include sexual relations with a child (18-years-old or younger), in any context (United Nations, 2017).

Sexual abuse of a child is when an adult engages in sexual activities with a child who, according to the relevant provisions of national law, has not reached the legal age for sexual activities. It also includes engaging in sexual activities with a child, whatever his or her age, where: - use is made of coercion, force, or threats; or - abuse is made of a recognized position of trust, authority, or influence over the child, including within the family; or - abuse is made of a particularly vulnerable situation of the child, notably because of a mental or physical disability or a situation of dependence (Lanzarote Convention of the Council of Europe, 2007).

Sexual Exploitation - Sexual exploitation is defined as an actual or attempted abuse of someone's position of vulnerability (such as a person depending on you for survival, food rations, school, books, transport, or other services), differential power or trust, to obtain sexual favours, including but not only, by offering money or other social, economic or political advantages. It includes trafficking and prostitution (WHO).

Sexual exploitation Sexual exploitation is any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including threatening or profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another (United Nations, 2017).

Sexual harassment - any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, which has the aim or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. (Council of Europe, 2019). Note: sexual harassment does not involve intercourse or another form of penetration.

Sexual Harassment at work: covers the following unwanted behaviours with sexual connotations that happen in a work context: inappropriate staring or leering; being exposed to sexually explicit images or videos; indecent sexual jokes or offensive remarks about a person's body or private life; inappropriate invitations to go out on a date or suggestions for sexual activity of any kind; unsolicited physical contact; inappropriate advances on social networking websites or sexually explicit emails or text messages; threatening with unpleasant consequences if sexual proposals or advances are refused; and any other similar behaviour with sexual connotations that took place at work or work-related settings and that offended, humiliated, or intimidated the respondent (EU-GBV survey, 2021).

Sexual violence in childhood refers to rape, unwanted touching of private parts, being forced/made to pose in front of a person or in front of camera, or being forced/ made to touch someone's private parts, where such abuse is experienced before the age of 15 (Violence in childhood) (EU-GBV survey, 2021).

Sexual violence in intimate relationships refers to any harmful or unwanted sexual behaviour that is imposed on a person, including rape, attempted rape, and other sexual acts (i.e. use of

force or coercion to obtain unwanted sexual acts or any sexual activity that a person finds degrading or humiliating, etc.) (Current partner violence, Former partner violence) (EU-GBV survey, 2021).

Stalking - repeatedly engaging in threatening conduct towards another person, causing her or him to fear for their safety. Stalkers may act individually or in a group, and their actions may include: pestering and annoying phone calls or text messages, life threats, following someone, repeated visits to their home, presenting gifts, or constant solicitation. Such behaviour may lead on to physical violence and even murder (Council of Europe, 2019).

Trafficking in human beings - the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation (source: Council of Europe Convention Against Trafficking in Human Beings, Council of Europe, 2019).

Stealthing - Stealthing is a form of rape. It happens when people agree to have sex with a condom and then someone either lies about putting a condom on or removes it without the other person's permission. (Source: [Types of sexual violence | Rape Crisis England & Wales](#))

Spiking - So-called 'spiking' is when someone puts alcohol or drugs into another person's drink or body without their knowledge or consent – in many cases, to make it easier to rape or sexually assault them. Some people use so-called 'date rape drugs' to do this (Source: [Types of sexual violence | Rape Crisis England & Wales](#)).

Voyeurism - Voyeurism is defined as viewing an *unsuspecting and non-consenting* person(s) engaging in private activities such as undressing, using the bathroom, or engaging in sexual activity ([Kaplan & Krueger, 1997](#); [Långström & Seto, 2006](#)) for sexual purposes ([Duff, 2018](#)). Voyeuristic behaviors can also include those which are facilitated by technology, such as recording over toilet cubicles, installing cameras in a private space, hacking webcams, or, more recently, 'upskirting'. 'Upskirting' is where an image or recording is taken underneath someone's clothing, and this behavior has recently come into public knowledge and since been included in legislation following multiple campaigns ([Lewis & Anitha, 2022](#); [Thompson, 2019](#)).

Risk Factors in Sports Settings

Understanding the risk factors associated with sexual violence (as these were documented in WP2) in sports settings is crucial for fostering a safer environment for all participants, as emphasized by the RISE team. Sports inherently involve power dynamics, hierarchical relationships, and periods of isolation during training and competition, all of which can contribute to vulnerabilities among athletes. These factors create an environment where misconduct can thrive, particularly when combined with cultural norms that prioritize success over the welfare of individuals. The RISE team highlights the importance of addressing these vulnerabilities through a comprehensive approach that promotes athlete welfare. This

discussion aims to unpack these risk factors, shedding light on how they operate within sports settings and emphasizing the need for proactive measures to protect athletes and promote a culture of respect and safety, as advocated by the RISE Consortium.

Power Dynamics

Power dynamics are a significant risk factor in sports settings (Brackenridge, 2001; Ohlert et al., 2018), often influencing the relationships between coaches, athletes, and support staff. In many sports, coaches hold substantial authority over athletes, not only in terms of training and performance but also regarding their personal lives. This power imbalance can create situations where athletes may feel compelled to comply with inappropriate behavior or remain silent about misconduct due to fear of repercussions, such as losing their position on a team or jeopardizing their future in the sport. As such, coaches may exploit their position of authority to manipulate athletes, which can lead to a range of abusive behaviors. For instance, coaches might leverage their power to coerce an athlete into unwanted sexual activity, believing that their authority grants them the right to engage in such actions. This exploitation is particularly concerning in youth sports, where young athletes may not fully understand the implications of their coaches' authority and the boundaries that should exist in a professional relationship. Moreover, power dynamics are not limited to coach-athlete relationships. Peers can also exert influence, especially in team settings where social hierarchies often emerge. An athlete might fear ostracism or retaliation from teammates if they speak out against inappropriate behavior. This culture of silence can perpetuate a cycle of abuse, as victims may feel they have no support within their team environment.

Hierarchical Relationships

Hierarchical relationships within sports organizations further exacerbate the risk of sexual violence (Roberts et al., 2020), as the RISE team has highlighted in their research. The structure of many sports teams is built on a tiered system where individuals in higher positions, such as coaches and team managers, wield considerable influence over those in lower positions, like players and support staff. This hierarchy can create an environment where those in power feel untouchable and can engage in misconduct without fear of accountability. In such settings, reports of abuse may be downplayed or ignored, particularly when they involve prominent figures in the organization. Victims may hesitate to come forward, fearing that their allegations will not be taken seriously or that they will face backlash from those in authority. The RISE team emphasizes that this issue is often compounded by a culture of loyalty within sports teams, where athletes may prioritize the reputation of the team or organization over their well-being. Furthermore, the emphasis on winning at all costs can lead to a culture that silences dissent. If an athlete raises concerns about inappropriate behavior, they might be labeled as a troublemaker or a distraction from the team's goals. This environment can dissuade athletes from reporting incidents, thereby allowing the cycle of abuse to continue unchecked. The RISE team stresses the importance of addressing these power imbalances to foster a culture of safety, accountability, and respect within sports organizations.

Isolation in Training

In addition, isolation is another critical factor that can contribute to the risk of sexual violence in sports. Intense training regimens often require athletes to spend long hours together in secluded environments, such as training camps, dormitories, or facilities (Roberts et al., 2020). This isolation can create opportunities for abusers to exploit athletes without witnesses present, making it easier to engage in inappropriate behavior. Additionally, the physical and emotional demands of training can lead to a sense of dependency among athletes. In striving for excellence, athletes may become reliant on their coaches and training staff not only for guidance but also for emotional support. The RISE team argues that this dependency can create an environment where athletes feel they cannot question or challenge authority figures, further increasing their vulnerability to abuse. Furthermore, the isolation experienced during training can be particularly acute in sports that require extensive travel or those that have limited access to external support systems. Therefore, the lack of external oversight in these situations can create a breeding ground for misconduct, as perpetrators may feel emboldened by the absence of accountability.

Cultural Norms and Acceptance

This lack of scrutiny is often compounded by cultural norms that may inadvertently support or tolerate inappropriate behaviors. Cultural norms surrounding sports can also play a significant role in perpetuating an environment conducive to sexual violence (Chroni & Kavoura, 2022). Many sports emphasize toughness, resilience, and a “win-at-all-costs” mentality, which can lead to the normalization of aggressive behavior, including harassment and abuse. The RISE team argues that such cultural attitudes can create barriers for athletes seeking to report incidents, as they may fear being labeled as weak or uncompetitive. Moreover, the stigma attached to victims of sexual violence can deter individuals from coming forward. Athletes may worry about how their allegations will affect their reputation or career prospects, leading to a reluctance to disclose their experiences. This stigma can be especially pronounced in male-dominated sports, where societal norms and expectations heavily influence the definition and expression of masculinity. Such pressures can create barriers to open communication and emotional expression, further perpetuating the stigma. Addressing these cultural norms is essential for creating a safer environment in sports. Organizations must actively promote values of respect, consent, and accountability, as emphasized by the RISE team, fostering a culture where athletes feel empowered to speak out against misconduct. The RISE team underscores the importance of education and training programs that emphasize these values, helping to shift the culture within sports settings. By doing so, sports organizations can make their environment less tolerant of abusive behavior and more supportive of athlete welfare, aligning with the broader priorities of the Erasmus+ calls. Therefore, addressing the risk factors associated with sexual violence in sports settings is essential for creating a safer environment for athletes. Power dynamics, hierarchical relationships, isolation in training, and cultural norms all contribute to the vulnerability of athletes and the prevalence of abuse. By acknowledging these factors and implementing proactive measures, sports organizations can work towards fostering a culture of respect,

accountability, and safety. It is only through collective efforts that we can hope to eradicate sexual violence in sports and ensure that all athletes can participate in their chosen sports without fear or harm.

Impact of Sexual Violence on Athletes

The impact of sexual violence on athletes extends far beyond the immediate incident, affecting their physical, psychological, and emotional well-being (Mountjoy et al., 2022; Mountjoy et al., 2016). Understanding these consequences is vital for fostering a supportive environment that addresses the needs of survivors and promotes healing.

Physical Consequences

Sexual violence can lead to a range of physical consequences for athletes. In cases involving physical assault, injuries can vary from bruises and abrasions to more severe trauma, such as broken bones or internal injuries. Moreover, sexual violence can have significant implications for an athlete's performance. Physical injuries may prevent them from training or competing at their usual level, resulting in lost opportunities and diminished athletic careers. This loss can be particularly devastating for athletes who have dedicated years to their sport, impacting not just their physical capabilities but also their aspirations and identity as athletes (Poucher et al., 2023; Walton et al., 2023).

Psychological Consequences

In addition to physical consequences due to sexual violence, the psychological consequences of sexual violence can be profound and long-lasting. Survivors often experience a range of mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression (Mountjoy & Edwards, 2022; Mountjoy & Verhagen, 2022). The trauma from the assault can lead to intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, and nightmares, significantly affecting an athlete's daily life and functioning. Furthermore, the psychological impact can create a barrier to performance and training. Athletes may struggle with concentration, motivation, and self-esteem, leading to decreased performance levels. Furthermore, the fear of re-experiencing the trauma or encountering reminders of the assault can hinder their ability to engage fully in their sport. This mental toll can lead to withdrawal from teammates and coaches, isolating the survivor and exacerbating feelings of loneliness and helplessness, and the stigma surrounding sexual violence can further complicate the psychological aftermath. Many athletes may fear judgment or lack of support from their peers, leading to reluctance to disclose their experiences. This silence can perpetuate feelings of shame and guilt, further damaging their mental health.

Emotional Consequences

Furthermore, the emotional consequences of sexual violence are equally significant and can manifest in various ways. Survivors often experience feelings of anger, betrayal, and confusion, particularly when the perpetrator is someone they know, such as a coach or teammate. This betrayal can erode trust in others, making it difficult for survivors to form or maintain relationships, both within and outside their sport. Additionally, athletes may struggle with their sense of identity and purpose after experiencing sexual violence. The sport

that once brought them joy and fulfillment may become a source of pain and trauma. This can result in the loss of passion for sport, prompting athletes to reconsider their involvement in athletics altogether. Recovery from the emotional impacts of sexual violence often requires time, support, and professional intervention, and counseling and support groups can provide survivors with a safe space to process their experiences, regain a sense of control, and develop coping strategies. However, accessing these resources can be challenging, particularly for athletes who feel pressure to maintain a façade of strength and resilience. As argued above, the impact of sexual violence on athletes is multifaceted, encompassing physical, psychological, and emotional consequences that can have profound effects on their lives and careers (Mountjoy & Edwards, 2022; Mountjoy & Verhagen, 2022). Recognizing these impacts is crucial for creating supportive environments that prioritize healing and recovery. By fostering open conversations about sexual violence and providing accessible resources, sports organizations can empower survivors to reclaim their identities and continue their athletic journeys with dignity and support.

Legal Framework and Regulations Surrounding Sexual Violence in Sports

Sexual violence in sports is a pressing issue that has garnered increasing attention at both national and international levels. Various legal frameworks and guidelines have been established to address this issue, particularly within the European Union (EU). These regulations aim to protect athletes, promote safe sporting environments, and ensure accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence.

International Legal Framework

At the international level, several key instruments address sexual violence, particularly in the context of human rights and Safeguarding from violence. The “[Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)” adopted by the United Nations in 1979, calls for state parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all fields, including sports. In particular, the Article 10 of CEDAW specifically emphasizes the importance of ensuring equality in access to sports and physical education, while Article 11 addresses the need for protective measures against violence and discrimination. Additionally, the “[United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#)” recognizes violence against women as a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, urging member states to adopt legal measures to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women.

European Union Regulations

At European level, the “[European Convention on Human Rights](#)” (ECHR) provides a foundational framework for protecting individuals from violence and discrimination. While it does not specifically address sexual violence in sports, the ECHR establishes the right to private and family life (Article 8), the prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3), and the right to an effective remedy (Article 13), which can be invoked in cases of sexual violence. In addition, several legal frameworks have been established to combat sexual violence and promote the rights of individuals in various sectors, including

sports. The “[EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#)” asserts that everyone is entitled to respect for their physical and mental integrity (Article 3), reinforcing the obligation of EU member states to protect individuals from violence, including sexual violence. In 2012, the EU adopted the “[Directive 2012/29/EU](#)”, which aims to establish minimum standards on the rights, support, and Safeguarding of victims of crime. This directive emphasizes the need for effective Safeguarding measures for victims of sexual violence and ensures that they have access to information, support services, and legal assistance. As such, all member states are required to adopt national legislation that aligns with this directive, promoting the rights of victims in all sectors, including sports. Furthermore, the European Commission has implemented various initiatives to raise awareness and address sexual violence in sports. The EU’s “[Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#)” includes specific actions to combat gender-based violence, enhance the role of women in sports, and promote a safe sporting environment. This strategy encourages collaboration between sports organizations, law enforcement, and civil society to develop comprehensive measures against sexual violence in sports.

National Laws and Guidelines

In addition to EU regulations, individual member states have established national laws and guidelines to address sexual violence in sports. Many countries have implemented legislation that criminalizes sexual violence and provides mechanisms for reporting and addressing incidents. For instance, countries like Sweden and [Denmark](#) have progressive laws that prioritize victim support and accountability for perpetrators. In particular, Sweden's legal framework defines and criminalizes sexual offenses under Chapter 6 of the Swedish Penal Code (Brottsbalken). In 2018, Sweden enacted a consent-based rape law, stipulating that sex without explicit consent is considered rape, even in the absence of violence or threats. This legislative change emphasizes the importance of mutual consent and strengthens Safeguardings against sexual violence. Similarly, Denmark has reformed its sexual violence laws to focus on consent and in 2020, the country introduced a consent-based definition of rape in Section 216 of the Danish Penal Code, stating that sexual intercourse without voluntary participation constitutes rape. This reform aims to improve victim support and increase accountability for perpetrators. In the UK, the “[Sexual Offences Act 2003](#)” provides a comprehensive legal framework for addressing sexual offences, including definitions of consent and various forms of sexual violence. The Act mandates that sports organizations implement safeguarding measures to protect athletes, especially minors, from sexual abuse. Moreover, national sports governing bodies across Europe often have their policies and codes of conduct that outline expected behaviors and procedures for reporting and addressing incidents of sexual violence. These organizations play a crucial role in creating a safe environment for athletes and ensuring that cases of sexual violence are taken seriously.

Recommendations and Future Directions

Despite existing laws and guidelines, the RISE team argues that there are still gaps in the legal framework surrounding sexual violence in sports. Many athletes, especially those in lower-profile sports, may not be aware of their rights or the resources available to them. Additionally, there is often a lack of consistency in how cases are handled across different

sports organizations and countries. To address these issues, it is essential for EU member states and sports organizations to enhance awareness campaigns about the legal safeguards available to athletes. Furthermore, establishing standardized reporting mechanisms and support systems across all sports can help ensure that survivors of sexual violence receive the assistance they need. Collaborative efforts between governmental bodies, sports organizations, and civil society are crucial in creating a robust legal framework that effectively addresses sexual violence in sports. By prioritizing the Safeguarding of athletes and fostering a culture of accountability, we can work towards eradicating sexual violence in sports and promoting safe environments for all participants. While significant progress has been made, more efforts are necessary to strengthen these laws and ensure that all athletes can participate in a safe and supportive environment.

3. Key Principles for Safe and Healthy Sports Environments

Respect for Athletes as Human Beings

Prioritizing dignity, rights, and well-being is a central focus of the RISE team. In particular, in the world of sports, athletes are often placed on pedestals and admired for their talents, dedication, and accomplishments. However, amidst the accolades and public admiration, it is essential to recognize and respect athletes as human beings with inherent dignity, rights, and well-being. The RISE team emphasizes that this respect extends beyond their athletic abilities; it encompasses their emotional, psychological, and physical health, ensuring they are treated with the dignity and consideration they deserve. This holistic approach to athlete care is key to fostering a safe and supportive sports environment, where athletes are valued not just for their performance, but as individuals deserving of safeguarding and respect. To truly achieve this, it is essential to understand athletes as whole individuals—recognizing that their well-being extends far beyond the playing field.

Understanding Athletes as Whole Individuals

Athletes are often viewed primarily through the lens of their performance, leading to a culture that prioritizes wins and losses over their personal lives and well-being. This perspective can lead to a neglect of their emotional and psychological needs, creating environments that can be exploitative or harmful. Respecting athletes means acknowledging them as whole individuals who experience the same complexities of life that everyone else does, including stress, anxiety, and personal challenges. To cultivate a culture of respect, sports organizations must acknowledge that athletes are more than just competitors—they are students, family members, and active participants in their communities. Like anyone else, they aspire, fear, and dream that extend far beyond their athletic pursuits. Recognizing and supporting their multifaceted identities is essential for fostering a respectful and inclusive environment. Therefore, by valuing their individuality, organizations can create an environment that promotes mental health, encourages open dialogue, and cultivates an atmosphere of empathy and understanding.

Prioritizing Dignity

Furthermore, the RISE team asserts that safeguarding athletes' dignity is essential and should serve as a foundational principle in sports. This entails respecting their autonomy, valuing their perspectives, and upholding their boundaries. Sports organizations must prioritize athletes' mental health and overall well-being by ensuring access to mental health resources, fostering a psychologically safe environment, and cultivating a culture of openness and support (Poucher et al., 2023; Walton et al., 2023). Many athletes face pressure from coaches, sponsors, and fans, which can lead to coercive situations where their dignity is compromised. For instance, instances of verbal abuse, bullying, or body shaming can erode an athlete's sense of self-worth. Respecting an athlete's dignity requires implementing policies that protect them from abuse and mistreatment. Organizations must enforce codes of conduct that hold coaches and officials accountable for their behavior, ensuring that athletes can speak out without fear of retribution. In addition, sports organizations should promote a culture of respect, equity, and inclusion. This includes providing education on harassment, abuse, and discrimination, ensuring that all athletes feel valued and supported (Gurgis et al., 2022), and accepting that their voices are heard and valued are essential for building trust and promoting a positive team dynamic.

Ensuring Rights Are Respected

Athletes, like all individuals, have fundamental rights that must be respected and upheld. The RISE team emphasizes the importance of these rights, which include fair treatment, the ability to speak out against injustices, and access to adequate healthcare and support services. Upholding these rights requires the establishment of transparent processes for addressing grievances and ensuring that athletes have safe and accessible avenues to report misconduct or discrimination. Moreover, it is essential to recognize and protect the rights of marginalized athletes, including women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those from diverse cultural backgrounds, as highlighted by the RISE team. Actively involving athletes in the development and implementation of safeguarding policies is a key step toward achieving this. Providing platforms for athletes to share their experiences and concerns helps ensure that their unique challenges are acknowledged and addressed (Mountjoy et al., 2022; Willson et al., 2022). By fostering inclusiveness and equality in sports, organizations can create a more supportive environment where all athletes can thrive without fear of discrimination or prejudice. This commitment aligns with the core values promoted by the RISE Consortium, reinforcing the need for athlete-centered policies that prioritize dignity, safety, and fairness.

Supporting Well-Being

Furthermore, athletes' well-being encompasses their physical, mental, and emotional health, a perspective that is central to the RISE team's approach. Sports organizations have a responsibility to prioritize the holistic well-being of their athletes, providing resources and support that address all aspects of their lives (Poucher et al., 2023; Walton et al., 2023). This can include access to mental health professionals, nutritional counseling, and physical therapy, ensuring that athletes have the tools to perform at their best. Moreover, promoting a culture of well-being involves encouraging athletes to prioritize self-care and balance in

their lives. Many athletes feel compelled to sacrifice their well-being for the sake of their sport, often neglecting their mental health in the pursuit of perfection. The RISE team emphasizes the importance of fostering an environment that emphasizes well-being over performance. By doing so, organizations can help athletes navigate the pressures of competition while maintaining their mental and emotional health, in line with the RISE Consortium's broader goals of ensuring athlete welfare and creating safer sports environments.

Education and Awareness

In addition to the above, respecting athletes as human beings requires ongoing education and awareness within the sports community (Gurgis et al., 2022). Coaches, officials, and administrators should receive training on treating athletes with dignity and respect. This training can include topics such as recognizing signs of mental distress, understanding the implications of bullying, and promoting inclusive practices within teams, among other things. Furthermore, athletes should be educated about their rights and the resources available to them, and by empowering them to advocate for themselves and others fosters a culture of respect that extends beyond individual teams and organizations. To achieve this, it is essential to shift from individual awareness to a collective responsibility, where all members of the sports community play an active role in promoting respect and support for one another.

Creating a Culture of Respect

Building a culture of respect in sports requires commitment from all the stakeholders involved—athletes, coaches, administrators, and fans, as emphasized by the RISE team in their work under this Erasmus+ project. Sports organizations must establish clear policies that promote respect and hold individuals accountable for their actions. This includes implementing anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies, creating safe reporting mechanisms, and ensuring that athletes have the support they need (Gurgis et al., 2022). Moreover, fostering respect involves celebrating athletes as individuals rather than just competitors. The RISE team also highlights the importance of highlighting the stories and struggles of athletes, as doing so can inspire others and promote a more compassionate understanding of the challenges they face, creating a more inclusive and respectful sports culture.

Athlete-Centered Approaches

Encouraging Holistic Development and Safeguarding Physical and Emotional Health

In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in the world of sports toward athlete-centered approaches, as highlighted by the RISE team in this handbook. In particular, Athlete-centered approaches focus on unique needs, aspirations, and experiences of each athlete, placing them at the core of the training and development process. This contrasts with traditional, coach-centered methods that prioritize competitive success above all else. By adopting an athlete-centered perspective, coaches, trainers, and sports organizations acknowledge the multifaceted nature of athletes' lives, taking into account their emotional,

psychological, and social dimensions. However, the foundation of an athlete-centered approach is built on collaboration and communication between athletes and their coaches as this dynamic fosters trust and respect, encouraging athletes to voice their needs, preferences, and concerns and by listening to athletes and integrating their feedback into training regimens and support systems, coaches can create a more personalized and effective training environment.

Holistic Development of Athletes

An athlete-centered approach prioritizes holistic development, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. Physically, it emphasizes long-term growth through age-appropriate training, injury prevention, and proper recovery. Mental health is supported by integrating techniques like mindfulness and cognitive strategies to build resilience and confidence under pressure. Emotional well-being is nurtured by creating a safe space for athletes to express feelings, develop emotional intelligence, and build coping skills. Socially, fostering positive relationships within teams and recognizing the role of family and support networks enhances an athlete's overall experience and development in sports and beyond.

Safeguarding Physical and Emotional Health

Furthermore, an athlete-centered approach emphasizes creating safe environments through clear policies against bullying and harassment, ensuring athletes feel secure and respected. Access to mental health resources, including counseling and wellness programs, is vital for emotional well-being. Encouraging work-life balance allows athletes to pursue interests beyond sports, reducing burnout. Implementing [Long-Term Athlete Development \(LTAD\)](#) models, which align training with an athlete's age and maturity, supports sustainable growth and performance.

Overall, it can be argued that Athlete-centered approaches represent a significant evolution in the world of sports, focusing on the holistic development of athletes and safeguarding their physical and emotional health. By prioritizing the unique needs of athletes, coaches, and sports organizations can create environments that foster not only athletic excellence but also personal growth and well-being. Ultimately, recognizing athletes as whole beings and implementing athlete-centered approaches lays the groundwork for a healthier, more sustainable sports culture. This shift enhances the athletes' experiences in their sporting careers and equips them with invaluable skills and resilience that serve them well beyond their time in competition.

Inclusivity and Non-Discrimination in Sports

Sports organizations, clubs, and governing bodies are increasingly recognizing the importance of creating environments that are welcoming to all individuals, regardless of their gender,

race, disability, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic. The principles of inclusivity and non-discrimination not only promote diversity but also strengthen the sporting community as a whole (Gurgis et al., 2022; Gurgis et al., 2022). True inclusivity in sports extends beyond mere participation—it requires fostering an environment where every individual feels valued, respected, and empowered to contribute meaningfully. When sports organizations prioritize inclusivity, they reap several benefits, including:

- ǒ Enhanced Performance: Diverse teams that embrace inclusivity can often outperform homogeneous groups. Various perspectives, skills, and experiences can lead to innovative strategies and improved decision-making both on and off the field.
- ǒ Increased Participation: By promoting inclusivity, sports organizations can attract a broader range of participants. This not only helps to grow the sport but also fosters a sense of belonging and community among individuals from different backgrounds.
- ǒ Social Responsibility: Sports organizations have a social responsibility to reflect the diversity of society. By implementing inclusive practices, they can demonstrate their commitment to social equity and serve as role models for other sectors.
- ǒ Improved Mental Health: Participation in sports has been linked to improved mental health outcomes. An inclusive environment allows individuals from all walks of life to engage in physical activity, thus promoting overall well-being.

Furthermore, in order for the sports organizations to cultivate inclusivity and prevent discrimination, they must adopt comprehensive policies that address various forms of discrimination, including those based on gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Here are several key policies and practices that can be implemented:

- ǒ The foundation of inclusivity lies in the establishment of clear anti-discrimination policies. These policies should explicitly prohibit discrimination and harassment based on gender, race, disability, and other characteristics. They should outline the procedures for reporting incidents of discrimination, ensuring that athletes and staff feel safe and supported when coming forward.
- ǒ Implementing diversity and inclusion training for coaches, athletes, and administrative staff is crucial. Such training should educate individuals about the importance of inclusivity, the impact of bias and discrimination, and strategies to create an inclusive environment. Training should also focus on cultural competency, helping participants understand and respect the backgrounds of their teammates and competitors.
- ǒ Sports organizations should develop recruitment strategies that actively seek to include individuals from diverse backgrounds. This can involve targeted outreach to underrepresented groups, partnerships with community organizations, and scholarship programs to support individuals who may face financial barriers to participation. Retention strategies should also be in place to ensure that all athletes feel valued and supported throughout their sporting journey.
- ǒ Gender discrimination remains a significant issue in sports, from pay disparities to unequal opportunities for women and non-binary individuals. Sports organizations

should implement gender equality policies that promote equal pay, provide equal access to resources, and support the development of women's sports programs. This can also involve promoting female representation in leadership roles within sports organizations.

- ǒ For athletes with disabilities, accessibility is paramount. Sports organizations should conduct accessibility audits to ensure that facilities, equipment, and programs are inclusive of individuals with disabilities. This may include providing adaptive sports equipment, ensuring physical accessibility to venues, and offering specialized training programs. Additionally, organizations should promote awareness of para-sports and create opportunities for athletes with disabilities to compete at all levels.
- ǒ Policies to support LGBTQ+ athletes are essential for fostering an inclusive environment. This can involve creating safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals, implementing guidelines for gender identity and expression in competition, and actively combating homophobia and transphobia in sports. Encouraging the use of preferred pronouns and creating awareness campaigns can also foster a more inclusive atmosphere.
- ǒ To ensure the effectiveness of inclusivity policies, sports organizations should establish mechanisms for monitoring and accountability. This can involve regular assessments of diversity and inclusion initiatives, feedback from athletes and staff, and public reporting of progress. Transparency in these efforts builds trust within the community and demonstrates a genuine commitment to inclusivity.

The Broader Implications of Inclusivity

The commitment to inclusivity and non-discrimination in sports has broader societal implications. By promoting diversity and equality, sports organizations can contribute to the dismantling of systemic barriers that marginalized communities face (Kerr et al., 2019). This not only fosters social change but also inspires the next generation of athletes to challenge discrimination in all its forms (MacPherson et al., 2022). Additionally, inclusive sports environments can serve as a model for other sectors, demonstrating the value of diversity and equality in workplaces, schools, and communities. The lessons learned in sports can be applied to create more equitable systems across society, promoting a culture of respect and understanding.

Transparency and Accountability in Sports

In the realm of sports, transparency and accountability are paramount for fostering an environment that prioritizes the safety, well-being, and dignity of all athletes. In recent years, numerous cases of abuse and misconduct have come to light, underscoring the urgent need for sports organizations to adopt policies that promote open communication and delineate clear roles and responsibilities in safeguarding athletes. As such, transparency refers to the practice of being open and clear about processes, decisions, and actions within sports organizations. Accountability, on the other hand, involves holding individuals and organizations responsible for their actions, ensuring that there are consequences for

wrongdoing. Together, these principles are essential for establishing a culture of trust and integrity within sports. Transparency and accountability are crucial for building trust among athletes, coaches, parents, and stakeholders. When sports organizations communicate openly about their policies, procedures, and decision-making processes, they foster confidence in their commitment to safeguarding athletes' rights and well-being.

As such, a transparent environment encourages athletes to report incidents of abuse or misconduct without fear of retaliation or dismissal. When individuals see that their concerns are taken seriously and that there is a clear process for addressing them, they are more likely to speak out, leading to a safer sporting environment. In addition, transparency and accountability serve as deterrents against unethical behavior. When individuals know that their actions are subject to scrutiny and that they can be held accountable for their choices, they are less likely to engage in harmful conduct. This creates a culture of ethical behavior that permeates all levels of the organization and transparent processes allow organizations to evaluate their practices critically and identify areas for improvement. By regularly reviewing policies and procedures, organizations can adapt to new challenges and enhance their safeguarding measures over time.

[Mechanisms for Implementing Transparency and Accountability](#)

The RISE team highlights that to cultivate transparency and accountability, sports organizations must implement specific mechanisms and practices. Here are several key strategies:

1. Clear Policies and Guidelines

Establishing clear policies and guidelines related to safeguarding is essential. These documents should outline the organization's commitment to protecting athletes, the reporting process for incidents of misconduct, and the consequences of these violations. Having well-defined policies ensures that everyone understands their rights and responsibilities, fostering an environment of accountability.

2. Open Communication Channels

Organizations should create open channels of communication where athletes, coaches, and stakeholders can voice their concerns and suggestions. This can include anonymous reporting systems, suggestion boxes, and regular meetings where feedback is encouraged. Open communication helps build trust and allows organizations to address potential issues proactively.

3. Regular Training and Education

Ongoing training and education on safeguarding practices should be mandatory for all staff, coaches, and athletes. This training should cover topics such as recognizing signs of abuse, understanding reporting procedures, and promoting a culture of respect. By equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to identify and address misconduct, organizations can enhance their safeguarding efforts.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular monitoring and evaluation of safeguarding policies and practices are crucial for maintaining accountability. Organizations should conduct audits and assessments to determine the effectiveness of their policies and identify areas for improvement. Feedback from athletes and stakeholders should be solicited to inform these evaluations, ensuring that the organization remains responsive to the needs of its community.

5. Independent Oversight Bodies

Establishing independent oversight bodies can enhance accountability within sports organizations. These bodies can include external committees or panels tasked with reviewing incidents of misconduct, investigating allegations, and providing recommendations for improvement. Independent oversight adds another layer of scrutiny, ensuring that organizations are accountable for their actions.

6. Transparent Disciplinary Procedures

Clear and transparent disciplinary procedures should be established to address violations of safeguarding policies. Organizations must communicate how disciplinary actions will be taken, the steps involved in investigations, and the potential consequences for perpetrators. Transparency in disciplinary procedures ensures that individuals understand the repercussions of their actions and reinforces the organization's commitment to accountability.

7. Public Reporting

Sports organizations should consider public reporting of safeguarding efforts and outcomes. Regularly publishing reports that detail the organization's safeguarding practices, incidents of misconduct, and actions taken can build trust within the community. Public accountability demonstrates a commitment to transparency and encourages a culture of responsibility.

4. Designing Policies for a Safe Sports Environment

The role of sports in society transcends physical fitness and competition; it fosters teamwork, discipline, and personal growth. However, with the growing popularity of sports at both professional and grassroots levels, ensuring that the sporting environment is safe and respectful for everyone involved is paramount. The RISE team recognizes the importance of this responsibility and argues that a safe sports environment minimizes the risks of physical harm, abuse, and inappropriate behavior while promoting fairness and inclusivity. Effective policy design is a crucial mechanism through which sports organizations can establish standards, protect participants, and promote ethical conduct.

Designing these policies is a multifaceted challenge that involves addressing a wide array of risks—ranging from physical injuries to emotional and psychological harm and central to creating a safer sports environment is the development of clear, comprehensive codes of

conduct. These codes provide explicit guidelines for acceptable behavior for staff, coaches, athletes, and spectators. Without such policies in place, a sports environment can become a breeding ground for abuse, discrimination, and other harmful behaviors. A well-defined code of conduct can serve as both a preventive measure and a tool for accountability, ensuring that everyone involved in sports understands their rights and responsibilities. Although one of the deliverables of WP3 is a handbook on "Standards of Conduct and Codes of Behavior," the RISE team will briefly reference it in this handbook on "How to Create a Safe and Healthy Environment that Values Athletes."

Creating a Code of Conduct

Standards for Acceptable Behavior for Staff, Coaches, and Athletes

A well-crafted code of conduct is the cornerstone of any safe and respectful sports environment. It sets forth clear expectations for behavior, creating a shared understanding among all participants about what is appropriate and what is not. For a sports organization, be it a community league, a school team, or a professional club, establishing standards of conduct for staff, coaches, and athletes is essential for preventing misconduct and promoting a positive culture. The RISE team emphasizes that the key to developing an effective code of conduct is recognizing the unique roles that staff, coaches, and athletes play in the sports ecosystem. Each group has specific responsibilities, and their behavior can significantly impact the well-being and experience of others. Therefore, the RISE team asserts that the code must outline tailored expectations that reflect the different functions and relationships these individuals have within the sports setting.

a) Setting Standards for Coaches

Coaches hold a unique and influential position within sports. They are mentors, educators, and leaders who have significant power over athletes' physical and emotional well-being. For this reason, the standards of behavior for coaches must reflect the gravity of their role. As such, a coach's primary responsibility is to prioritize the health and safety of their athletes. This includes fostering an environment that promotes physical well-being, mental health, and emotional safety. Coaches should be trained to recognize signs of overtraining, injury, or emotional distress and respond appropriately. They should also cultivate a culture of respect, where diversity and inclusion are prioritized, and where every athlete feels valued, regardless of their background or skill level. Additionally, a coach's code of conduct should prohibit any form of abuse—whether physical, emotional, or sexual. Strict policies should be in place to prevent inappropriate relationships or behaviors that could lead to exploitation or harm. Coaches must understand that their role is to guide and support athletes, not to exert control or power in ways that are detrimental to an athlete's welfare. This includes refraining from verbal abuse, intimidation, or using punitive measures that can damage an athlete's self-esteem or mental health.

Moreover, coaches must adhere to ethical standards related to fairness in competition. They should promote sportsmanship and discourage cheating or unsportsmanlike conduct, both on and off the field. Coaches should also be held accountable for upholding the values of

respect, integrity, and fairness in their interactions with athletes, referees, parents, and opposing teams. In line with this, the RISE team stresses the importance of ensuring that all members of a sports organization are aligned with these principles.

b) Establishing Expectations for Staff

The behavior of support staff within a sports organization—ranging from medical personnel to administrators—is also crucial for maintaining a safe environment. These individuals must uphold the same commitment to safety, respect, and professionalism as coaches and athletes, as emphasized by the RISE team. Furthermore, staff members, particularly those in medical roles, must prioritize the health and safety of athletes above all else. They should ensure that athletes are physically fit to participate in their sports and should be vigilant in identifying and treating injuries promptly. Ethical guidelines must be established to prevent the misuse of power or influence, particularly in situations where athletes may feel pressured to return to play before they are ready. In addition, administrative staff should also adhere to strict confidentiality standards regarding athletes' personal information, including medical records. They play an important role in ensuring that the organization complies with all legal and ethical obligations, such as ensuring equitable treatment of all athletes, regardless of gender, race, or background. Moreover, staff should serve as role models by promoting a positive culture of respect and professionalism. They should be trained in recognizing and addressing misconduct and should take immediate and appropriate action if they witness any form of harassment, discrimination, or abuse.

c) Defining Athletes' Responsibilities

Athletes, too, play a pivotal role in creating a safe and respectful sports environment. While they are participants, they also have responsibilities to their peers, coaches, and themselves, as emphasized by the RISE team. A code of conduct for athletes should emphasize the importance of respect for others, both on and off the field, and they should be expected to display good sportsmanship, including respecting their opponents, referees, and team members. They must commit to fair play and adhere to the rules of the game, understanding that unsportsmanlike behavior can lead to harm or injury. Additionally, athletes should refrain from engaging in bullying, hazing, or any other behavior that could create a hostile or unsafe environment for their teammates or opponents. Furthermore, athletes should be encouraged to take responsibility for their well-being by communicating openly with coaches and medical staff about any injuries or health concerns. They should also understand the importance of mental health and feel supported in seeking help if they are struggling with emotional or psychological issues. Creating a culture where athletes feel empowered to prioritize their health can prevent many of the pressures that lead to burnout, injury, or emotional distress.

d) Enforcing the Code of Conduct

The success of any code of conduct depends on its enforcement. It is not enough to simply outline behavioral expectations; there must be clear mechanisms in place to ensure accountability. The RISE team emphasizes that sports organizations should establish procedures for reporting violations, investigating claims, and imposing appropriate

consequences. As such, a zero-tolerance policy toward serious misconduct, such as abuse or discrimination, should be enforced, with clear consequences for those found guilty of violations. At the same time, the RISE team suggests that there should be opportunities for education and rehabilitation, particularly for less severe infractions, allowing individuals to learn from their mistakes and contribute positively to the sports environment moving forward.

Implementing Reporting and Complaint Mechanisms

Establishing effective reporting and complaint mechanisms is crucial in any organization, especially in sports, where safeguarding athletes from abuse, harassment, and misconduct is paramount. The RISE team stresses the importance of providing accessible, confidential, and reliable channels for individuals—including athletes, coaches, and staff—to report incidents without fear of retaliation. These mechanisms promote a safer, more accountable environment by ensuring transparency and addressing grievances promptly. Therefore, the implementation process begins with creating a clear policy that outlines how reports should be made and to whom they should be directed. A multi-tiered approach—incorporating online portals, helplines, and in-person options—ensures accessibility. The RISE team emphasizes that confidentiality must be maintained to protect complainants and minimize the risk of retaliation. Training plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of these mechanisms. Both athletes and staff should be educated on how to use these channels, while all staff involved in handling complaints must undergo specialized training to manage them sensitively and in line with legal and ethical standards. Regular monitoring and feedback from stakeholders are essential to adapt and improve the reporting system. An efficient, transparent reporting mechanism fosters a culture of safety, trust, and fairness, protecting all participants from harm, as highlighted by the RISE team. In this context, ensuring that athletes have a safe, confidential, and accessible way to report incidents of abuse, harassment, or misconduct is crucial to safeguarding their well-being. Effective procedures for reporting incidents create a foundation of trust and empower athletes to come forward without fear of retaliation or victimization. To implement such procedures, a multi-step, athlete-centered approach is necessary. Below are the key components for designing and implementing these procedures.

1. Clear, Accessible Channels for Reporting

A crucial first step in creating reporting procedures is establishing clear, accessible, and varied channels for athletes to file complaints. These channels should be well-advertised and made available in multiple formats, such as:

- ǒ Online portals: Secure, encrypted platforms where athletes can submit complaints anonymously if they prefer.
- ǒ Telephone hotlines: 24/7 helplines staffed by trained personnel capable of offering immediate support and guidance.
- ǒ In-person reporting: Designated individuals within the organization, such as safeguarding officers or trusted staff members, who are trained to handle complaints.

Ensuring that athletes know about these reporting mechanisms is essential. Regular reminders through team meetings, training sessions, and written materials should communicate the existence and purpose of these channels. Importantly, these procedures must be tailored to the specific needs of the athletes, with options that take into account different languages, literacy levels, or disabilities.

2. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a cornerstone of any reporting mechanism, as athletes may fear repercussions if their identity is revealed. Safeguarding their privacy encourages more individuals to come forward. Procedures must clearly state that reports will be handled with the utmost discretion, and in cases where the athlete wishes to remain anonymous, options must be available (Gurgis et al., 2022; Walton et al., 2021). For instance, online portals can include features allowing anonymous submissions, and reports can be handled in a way that prevents the identity of the complainant from being disclosed unnecessarily. However, the system should also explain any limitations to anonymity, particularly when the organization must act to protect others or fulfill legal obligations. Athletes need to be informed about what level of anonymity can be realistically maintained and under what circumstances confidentiality might be broken.

3. Support and Counseling for Athletes

Reporting incidents can be emotionally challenging, and athletes may need support beyond simply filing a report. Organizations must provide access to counseling services or victim support systems to assist athletes throughout the process. This support could include:

- ǒ Counseling services: Either in-house or through partnerships with external organizations, offering emotional support for victims of abuse or harassment.
- ǒ Legal advice: Guidance on athletes' rights, the process of investigating complaints, and any potential legal proceedings.
- ǒ Peer support programs: Connecting athletes who have been through similar experiences to provide a sense of solidarity and shared understanding.

Having these support structures in place reassures athletes that the organization takes their concerns seriously and is committed to their well-being.

4. Investigation and Resolution Process

Once an incident is reported, it is crucial that the organization handles the complaint swiftly, thoroughly, and fairly. A standardized investigation ensures that all complaints are treated consistently and with due diligence. Key steps should include:

- ǒ Acknowledgment of the report: Athletes should receive immediate confirmation that their complaint has been received, along with information about what steps will follow.
- ǒ Independent investigation: The investigation should ideally be conducted by an impartial third party or internal safeguarding professionals with no conflicts of interest.

- ǒ Timeline transparency: Athletes must be informed about the expected timeline for the investigation, with regular updates provided. Lengthy delays or lack of communication can deter others from reporting incidents in the future.
- ǒ Fair resolution: If the investigation finds that misconduct has occurred, appropriate disciplinary actions should be taken, which could include suspensions, expulsions, or legal referrals, depending on the severity of the incident.

This process must ensure fairness for both the complainant and the accused, maintaining a balance between accountability and the right to due process.

5. Safeguarding Against Retaliation

Fear of retaliation is a major barrier to reporting incidents. Procedures must include specific safeguards for athletes to prevent any form of retribution. These can involve:

- ǒ Anti-retaliation policies: Clear statements prohibiting any negative actions against athletes who report incidents.
- ǒ Monitoring of post-report environments: Supervisors and staff should actively monitor the athlete's environment after they report an incident to ensure no retaliatory behavior occurs.
- ǒ Legal recourse: Athletes should be informed of their rights to seek legal Safeguarding if retaliation does occur.

6. Training and Awareness

Furthermore, all athletes, staff, and coaches must receive regular training on the reporting procedures. This includes understanding what constitutes reportable behavior, how to file a complaint, and what safeguards are in place. These training sessions foster a culture of safety and transparency, making it clear that the organization prioritizes athlete welfare. Overall, implementing safe and comprehensive procedures for athletes to report incidents requires a combination of clear communication, confidentiality, support, and fairness. By establishing trust and ensuring that every step of the process is handled with care and professionalism, organizations can create an environment where athletes feel empowered to speak out, confident that their concerns will be heard and addressed responsibly.

Setting Clear Consequences and Sanctions

Establishing clear consequences and sanctions for violations of rules, policies, or codes of conduct is crucial to maintaining discipline and accountability in any organization, including sports teams, institutions, or governing bodies. The RISE team emphasizes that predefined sanctions create a fair, transparent, and consistent approach to discipline, reinforcing a culture of responsibility and ensuring that all participants understand the repercussions of their actions. Clear consequences provide a deterrent against inappropriate behavior and give athletes, staff, and stakeholders confidence in the organization's commitment to high standards. Sanctions can range from warnings and suspensions to expulsion or legal action, depending on the violation. The RISE team highlights the importance of outlining these sanctions in official policies, such as codes of conduct or handbooks, and regularly

communicating them to all members. Fairness and proportionality are key to any disciplinary system. Sanctions must match the severity of the offense, with minor infractions treated differently from serious misconduct. A transparent process ensures clarity and allows for appeals. The RISE team emphasizes that, ultimately, a clear system of consequences helps foster a culture of respect, accountability, and safety, promoting a secure environment where everyone can perform at their best.

Protocols for Disciplinary Action Against Violations

When violations of codes of conduct, rules, or policies occur, organizations must have well-defined protocols for initiating and carrying out disciplinary action. The RISE team stresses that these protocols help ensure violations are addressed fairly, transparently, and consistently. In sports, where the physical and emotional well-being of athletes is paramount, a clear disciplinary process helps safeguard participants and maintain a positive, ethical environment. Below are key components to consider when designing and implementing disciplinary protocols.

1. Clear Definition of Violations

The first step in any disciplinary process is defining what constitutes a violation. Organizations must establish a comprehensive set of rules and guidelines that govern acceptable behavior, including those related to ethics, safety, and respect for others. In sports contexts, this can include actions such as:

- ǒ Abuse or harassment: Physical, emotional, or sexual misconduct against athletes, staff, or other stakeholders.
- ǒ Substance abuse: Violating anti-doping regulations or using illegal substances.
- ǒ Unsportsmanlike conduct: Engaging in cheating, violence, or other behaviors which undermines fair play.
- ǒ Non-compliance with training protocols: Failing to adhere to required practices, meetings, or organizational directives.

These violations should be communicated through official documentation, such as a code of conduct, team handbooks, or contracts and athletes, coaches, and staff must be regularly reminded of the standards they are expected to uphold, as well as the consequences for violating them.

2. Reporting Mechanism and Preliminary Assessment

Once a violation is reported, the organization should have a structured process for receiving and assessing the complaint. This begins with an accessible, confidential, and secure reporting mechanism, allowing individuals to report violations without fear of retaliation. After a report is filed, an initial assessment is conducted to determine the validity and seriousness of the violation. This step is essential for ensuring that minor infractions are not treated with the same severity as major ones. During this preliminary stage, the organization should:

- ǒ Review the evidence: Collect all available information, such as witness statements, video footage, or relevant documents.
- ǒ Assess the severity of the violation: Determine if the behavior warrants a formal investigation or if it can be resolved through informal measures, such as a warning or mediation.
- ǒ Maintain confidentiality: Protect the identities of those involved during this stage to avoid undue speculation or harm to reputations.

If the preliminary assessment indicates that the violation requires further investigation, the next phase of the disciplinary protocol is triggered.

3. Formal Investigation Process

A formal investigation should follow a standardized procedure to ensure fairness, transparency, and thoroughness. Key elements of this process should include:

- ǒ Assigning investigators: Ideally, the investigation should be carried out by impartial, trained individuals, either from within the organization or external professionals, to avoid conflicts of interest.
- ǒ Gathering evidence: This includes interviewing the complainant, witnesses, and the accused, as well as reviewing any documentation, correspondence, or other relevant materials.
- ǒ Following due process: The accused must be given the opportunity to respond to the allegations and present their side of the story. This ensures that the investigation is balanced and considers all perspectives.
- ǒ Timely execution: Investigations should be conducted in a timely manner to prevent prolonged uncertainty for all parties involved. However, the need for speed should not compromise the thoroughness or fairness of the process.

Once the investigation is complete, a detailed report should be prepared, outlining the findings and recommending appropriate sanctions or next steps.

4. Determining Consequences

The organization must establish a clear and consistent framework for determining consequences based on the outcome of the investigation. Sanctions should be proportionate to the severity of the violation and could include:

- ǒ Verbal or written warnings: For minor infractions or first-time offenses.
- ǒ Fines or penalties: Monetary consequences for breaches of contractual or team obligations.
- ǒ Suspensions: Temporary removal from competition, training, or organizational activities.
- ǒ Expulsion: Permanent removal from the team, organization, or competition for severe violations.
- ǒ Referral to legal authorities: In cases involving criminal activity, such as assault or abuse, the matter should be referred to law enforcement.

The disciplinary committee or decision-makers must follow the pre-established guidelines for sanctions and as such, they should avoid arbitrary or overly punitive measures that could harm the reputation of the organization or lead to unnecessary conflicts. Consistency is key in reinforcing that all violations are taken seriously and treated fairly.

5. Appeals Process

To ensure fairness, athletes and staff must be provided with the opportunity to appeal against any disciplinary actions taken against them. The appeals process should be clearly defined and should involve:

- ǒ Time limits for appeals: Setting a deadline for when an individual can appeal a decision.
- ǒ Review by an independent panel: The appeal should be reviewed by a different body or individual than those who conducted the initial investigation to maintain impartiality.
- ǒ Grounds for appeal: Appeals can be based on new evidence, procedural errors, or a perceived disproportionate sanction.

A fair and accessible appeals process is essential in ensuring trust in the disciplinary system and preventing potential miscarriages of justice.

6. Communication of Outcomes

In addition, transparency is a critical aspect of the disciplinary process. Once a decision has been reached, the organization must communicate the outcome to all relevant parties. This communication should include:

- ǒ The nature of the violation: A summary of the findings from the investigation.
- ǒ The sanctions imposed: A clear explanation of the consequences for the violation.
- ǒ Next steps: Information on whether the individual has the right to appeal and any additional actions that will be taken by the organization.

While it is important to maintain confidentiality where appropriate, particularly for sensitive matters, transparency ensures accountability and reinforces the organization's commitment to addressing misconduct.

7. Monitoring and Enforcement of Sanctions

Once sanctions have been imposed, the organization must actively monitor compliance. For example, if an athlete has been suspended, they should not be allowed to participate in competitions or practices during the suspension period. Similarly, fines or other penalties must be enforced promptly. The RISE team emphasizes that regular checks should also be conducted to ensure that the disciplinary process remains effective and up to date with legal and ethical standards. Organizations should review their protocols periodically, incorporating feedback from athletes, staff, and legal experts to refine and improve the system.

European Commission Publications

[Sport and integrity](#)

This publication outlines the European Commission's initiatives to promote integrity and prevent misconduct, including violence, anti-doping and fighting match-fixing in sports.

[New EU Work Plan for Sport \(2024 -2027\)](#)

Although this action plan covers a range of sports-related policies, it includes measures aimed at ensuring fair play and combating violence and misconduct in sports.

[Combating Violence and Discrimination in Sport](#)

While primarily focused on racism and discrimination, this document also addresses broader issues of violence and misconduct, providing frameworks for disciplinary actions.

[Gender Equality in Sports](#)

This publication discusses the role of sports in promoting equality and combating violence, outlining policies and protocols for maintaining a safe sporting environment.

Council of Europe Publications

[Violence in Sports](#)

This recommendation provides comprehensive guidelines for member states to combat violence in sports, including protocols for disciplinary actions and preventive measures.

[Safe Sport](#)

The Safeguarding of athletes is a key element of the European Sports Charter, the Code of Sport Ethics and specific sport related recommendations of the Council of Europe.

Accessing the Publications

To access these publications:

1. **Visit the provided links:** Click on the hyperlinks above to navigate directly to the publications.
2. **Search on Official Websites:** If a specific link is unavailable, you can visit the main websites of the European Commission or the Council of Europe and use their search

functionalities with keywords such as "violence in sport," "disciplinary protocols," or "sports integrity."

3. **Contact Relevant Departments:** For further assistance, consider reaching out to the sports departments of these organizations through their contact pages.

These resources provide comprehensive guidelines and protocols to help organizations effectively address and discipline violations in sports, particularly those involving violence. Implementing these protocols can foster a safer and more respectful sporting environment for all participants.

Appointing a Safeguarding Officer

Appointing a Safeguarding Officer is essential for ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals, particularly athletes. The RISE team emphasizes that this role is vital for preventing and addressing abuse, harassment, discrimination, and misconduct within sports organizations, creating a secure environment for athletes, especially vulnerable groups. Furthermore, selecting the right Safeguarding Officer is critical. They should have expertise in safeguarding, child Safeguarding, and welfare, alongside strong communication skills and professionalism. The RISE team highlights the importance of independence in this role to act impartially, without outside influence. Once appointed, the Safeguarding Officer serves as the primary contact for safety-related issues, receiving and investigating reports, conducting training, and ensuring robust safeguarding policies are followed. They also play a proactive role by educating athletes and staff on safeguarding practices and collaborating with external agencies when necessary. Therefore, having a dedicated Safeguarding Officer demonstrates an organization's commitment to athlete welfare, fostering trust and accountability, and ensuring that everyone's rights and well-being are protected, as emphasized by the RISE team.

The Role and Responsibilities of a Designated Safeguarding Officer

The Designated Safeguarding Officer plays a crucial role in maintaining the safety, security, and well-being of individuals within sports organizations and their primary responsibility is to protect athletes, particularly children and vulnerable adults, from harm, abuse, harassment, or exploitation. This role goes beyond responding to incidents, as they must also take preventive measures to create a culture of safety and respect within the organization.

a) Receiving and Handling Reports of Misconduct

One of the core responsibilities of the Designated Safeguarding Officer is to be the first point of contact for receiving reports of abuse, misconduct, or any safeguarding concerns. This includes allegations of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, bullying, discrimination, or other forms of inappropriate behavior. The officer must:

- Create accessible reporting channels: Ensuring that athletes, staff, and even parents know how to report concerns in a confidential and safe manner.

- ǒ Maintain confidentiality: Safeguarding the privacy of those involved in the complaint, while ensuring that reports are handled sensitively and professionally.
- ǒ Act swiftly: Immediate action is essential to protect the individuals involved, especially in cases where there may be an ongoing risk to the athlete or others.

It is crucial that the Safeguarding Officer is trained in handling sensitive information and managing cases of abuse, following legal and organizational protocols to avoid re-victimization of the complainants.

b) Conducting Investigations

Once a report is made, the Safeguarding Officer may be required to conduct a preliminary investigation to gather the facts. This involves:

- ǒ Interviewing the complainant and any witnesses: Ensuring that all parties are given the opportunity to share their perspectives in a safe and non-threatening environment.
- ǒ Documenting the incident: Keeping clear, detailed records of all reports, interviews, and evidence collected.
- ǒ Referring to external agencies: In severe cases, such as those involving criminal behavior, the Safeguarding Officer should work with law enforcement or child Safeguarding services. Knowing when to refer the case to authorities is a critical part of their role.

Investigations must be conducted impartially, ensuring that the process is fair for both the complainant and the accused. The Safeguarding Officer must remain neutral throughout the investigation, making decisions based on facts and evidence.

c) Developing and Implementing Safeguarding Policies

The Designated Safeguarding Officer is also responsible for developing and enforcing the organization's safeguarding policies. These policies outline the standards of behavior expected within the organization and provide a framework for preventing and addressing misconduct. The Officer's duties in this area should include:

- ǒ Creating comprehensive safeguarding guidelines: This involves establishing clear rules for appropriate conduct between athletes, coaches, and staff, especially concerning relationships with minors or vulnerable individuals.
- ǒ Regularly updating policies: Ensuring that the policies are in line with national and international legal requirements and adapt to emerging issues in sports safety.
- ǒ Communicating the policies: The Safeguarding Officer should ensure that everyone in the organization—athletes, coaches, staff, and volunteers—understands the safeguarding policies and their roles in maintaining a safe environment.

An effective safeguarding policy also includes procedures for handling breaches of conduct, defining the consequences of violating the rules, and offering a clear pathway for addressing complaints.

d) Training and Awareness

Prevention is a key aspect of the Designated Safeguarding Officer's role. By training athletes, staff, and volunteers on safeguarding issues, they can prevent incidents from occurring and ensure that everyone in the organization is vigilant in maintaining a safe space. This may include, but not be limited to:

- ǒ Conducting regular training sessions: These sessions should cover topics such as recognizing signs of abuse, understanding appropriate boundaries, and knowing how to report concerns.
- ǒ Creating a culture of openness: The Officer should foster an environment where safeguarding is discussed openly, and athletes feel comfortable reporting concerns without fear of retaliation.
- ǒ Empowering athletes: Athletes, especially younger ones, need to be educated on their rights and taught how to recognize inappropriate behavior. Training should focus on helping them identify red flags and encouraging them to speak out if they feel uncomfortable.

By raising awareness about safeguarding, the Safeguarding Officer helps to reduce the risk of misconduct and ensures that everyone understands their role in keeping athletes safe.

e) Monitoring and Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation of safeguarding practices is critical to ensuring their effectiveness. The Safeguarding Officer should regularly monitor how the policies are being implemented and whether they are successful in preventing abuse. This may include, but not be limited to:

- ǒ Reviewing incident reports and feedback: Analyzing patterns in the types of reports being made can help the organization identify areas where further action or improvement is needed.
- ǒ Updating procedures: Based on new information or feedback, the Safeguarding Officer should revise policies and protocols to ensure they remain effective and relevant.
- ǒ Conducting safeguarding audits: Periodically, the Safeguarding Officer should conduct an audit of the organization's safeguarding practices to ensure compliance and identify areas for improvement.

This proactive approach helps to ensure that safeguarding measures are not only in place but are also functioning effectively to protect athletes and staff.

f) Liaising with External Bodies

In many cases, the Safeguarding Officer will need to collaborate with external bodies, such as law enforcement, child Safeguarding services, or sport governing bodies. This should require:

- ǒ Building relationships with relevant authorities: Establishing a network of contacts within child Safeguarding services, local authorities, and law enforcement ensures that cases can be referred promptly when needed.
- ǒ Ensuring legal compliance: The Safeguarding Officer must stay informed about relevant laws and regulations concerning safeguarding and ensure that the organization complies with them.
- ǒ Representing the organization in safeguarding matters: When cases involve external scrutiny or media attention, the Safeguarding Officer may need to represent the organization and ensure that its safeguarding policies and actions are communicated clearly and effectively.

Liaising with external bodies also helps to keep the organization aligned with best practices in safeguarding and ensures that they are up to date on the latest developments in protecting athletes. Overall, it can be argued that the Designated Safeguarding Officer's role is multifaceted and essential in creating a safe and supportive environment within sports organizations. From handling reports of abuse to developing safeguarding policies and conducting training, their work ensures that athletes are protected from harm, and any incidents of misconduct are addressed swiftly and effectively. By fulfilling these responsibilities, the Safeguarding Officer contributes significantly to maintaining the integrity and safety of the sporting community. The RISE team emphasizes that such proactive roles are foundational to fostering a secure and accountable sports culture.

5. Developing Prevention and Awareness Programs

Developing prevention and awareness programs is a critical aspect of fostering safe environments in sports organizations. The RISE team highlights that these programs aim to equip coaches, staff, athletes, parents, and the broader community with the knowledge and tools needed to prevent misconduct, such as sexual violence, and promote a culture of respect and safety. Effective prevention programs focus on education, empowerment, and proactive strategies that engage all stakeholders. Key elements include training for coaches and staff, education for athletes, parent and community involvement, and bystander intervention training.

Training for Coaches and Staff

Sexual violence in sports can have devastating effects on athletes, particularly vulnerable individuals. The RISE team emphasizes the importance of implementing awareness and prevention strategies for coaches and staff to maintain a safe environment. Coaches, who often hold significant authority, must be equipped with tools to recognize, prevent, and respond to sexual violence. Effective strategies focus on education, safeguarding, open communication, and understanding power dynamics, boundaries, and consent. Training coaches and staff is crucial as they often have close contact with athletes and serve as role

models. They must understand their responsibility in creating a safe space. The RISE team stresses that training should cover recognizing signs of misconduct, including both overt acts like sexual assault and subtler behaviors such as grooming. Coaches must be aware of the power dynamics that could lead to abuse, especially in sports, where athletes may fear retaliation or lost opportunities. Training should also include legal obligations and the procedures for reporting abuse. By educating coaches and staff on these strategies, they become essential defenders of athlete safety, as highlighted by the RISE team and the training programs must delve deeply into the realities of sexual violence, helping participants understand how it manifests and the psychological, emotional, and physical damage it causes to victims. Coaches should be aware of common red flags, including overly personal relationships between staff and athletes, inappropriate communication outside of professional contexts, and athletes exhibiting discomfort or fear around certain individuals. Key components of awareness training should include:

- ǒ Recognizing Warning Signs: Coaches should be trained to identify warning signs of sexual violence. This might include changes in an athlete's behavior, reluctance to attend training sessions, or emotional distress following interactions with specific individuals. Athletes who are victims of sexual violence may also withdraw socially, show sudden drops in performance, or express physical signs of stress such as injuries, fatigue, or illness.
- ǒ Understanding Grooming: Grooming is a process by which a perpetrator builds an emotional connection with a young athlete with the intent to manipulate and exploit them sexually. Grooming often starts subtly, making it difficult to detect in its early stages. Coaches and staff should be trained to recognize patterns of behavior that may suggest grooming, such as excessive one-on-one time with athletes, giving gifts or special treatment, or isolating athletes from their peers.
- ǒ Recognizing Power Imbalances: In sports, coaches and staff often hold considerable power over athletes due to their influence on team selection, playing time, and future opportunities. Awareness programs must emphasize the ways in which these power imbalances can be exploited. Coaches should learn how to foster a healthy and respectful relationship with athletes, ensuring they do not cross professional boundaries.
- ǒ Recognizing Subtle Forms of Harassment: Sexual violence doesn't always present as overtly aggressive behavior. It can begin with inappropriate jokes, suggestive comments, or boundary-crossing behavior, which may escalate if unchecked. Coaches should be made aware of the damage caused by these behaviors and how to prevent them from escalating.

Furthermore, prevention strategies for sexual violence must be practical and enforceable. These strategies require commitment from the entire sports organization and should be based on policies that are communicated to everyone involved.

- ǒ Establishing Boundaries: Prevention begins with setting clear boundaries between athletes and coaches. Coaches and staff should adhere to strict professional guidelines regarding physical contact, personal relationships, and communication with athletes. For instance, all communication should be sport-related and conducted through official channels. Physical contact should always be appropriate, and any interactions that occur outside training sessions should be discouraged or closely monitored.
- ǒ Safeguarding Policies and Codes of Conduct: Every sports organization should have a safeguarding policy that outlines expected behavior, procedures for reporting misconduct, and the consequences of violations. Coaches and staff should be well-versed in these policies and held accountable for adhering to them. Additionally, all interactions between athletes and staff should comply with a clearly defined code of conduct that emphasizes respect, consent, and professionalism.
- ǒ Supervision and Transparency: Implementing rules around supervision and transparency can help prevent sexual violence. For example, one-on-one interactions between athletes and coaches should always be conducted in open, observable environments. When traveling for competitions, guidelines should be in place regarding accommodations and supervision. All staff should understand that transparency reduces opportunities for inappropriate behavior and protects both athletes and coaches.
- ǒ Creating Safe Reporting Mechanisms: To prevent sexual violence effectively, athletes must feel empowered to report any concerns without fear of retaliation. Coaches and staff should be trained to facilitate safe, confidential, and supportive reporting processes. This includes being approachable, listening to athletes' concerns, and knowing how to escalate issues appropriately. Reporting channels should be clear and accessible, with guarantees of confidentiality and Safeguarding for those making a report.
- ǒ Regular Training and Reinforcement: Awareness and prevention strategies must be continually reinforced through regular training sessions. Coaches and staff should participate in ongoing education to stay updated on best practices and evolving legal and ethical standards. This regular reinforcement helps to create a culture of vigilance and accountability where the prevention of sexual violence is a shared responsibility.

Education for Athletes

Educating athletes on their rights and how to recognize unsafe situations is crucial. The RISE team emphasizes that prevention programs should be age-appropriate and tailored to the specific risks athletes may face. These programs should make athletes aware of their right to participate in sports free from harassment, abuse, or exploitation and they should be empowered to identify warning signs of inappropriate behavior, such as uncomfortable physical contact or coercion. They should also be informed about available reporting mechanisms and encouraged to speak up if something feels wrong, whether it involves themselves or others. The RISE team highlights that awareness of rights not only prevents victimization but fosters a culture where athletes feel in control of their safety and well-being.

While coaches and staff are trained to prevent and respond to misconduct, athletes must also have the knowledge to recognize and report unsafe situations. Education empowers them to understand their rights, identify signs of abuse, and feel confident in reporting inappropriate behavior. The RISE team stresses that many athletes, particularly vulnerable ones, may be unaware of power dynamics that lead to exploitation. Targeted educational programs help athletes understand consent, personal boundaries, and respect. These programs reduce abuse risk and create a culture of openness and accountability where athletes can voice concerns. In addition, education also encourages self-advocacy, ensuring athletes know how to access support services and report incidents. By reinforcing that their well-being is as important as performance, these programs contribute to a zero-tolerance approach to abuse and empower athletes to participate in safeguarding efforts, as promoted by the RISE team.

The first step in these programs is to inform athletes of their fundamental rights within a sports environment. Every athlete has the right to train, compete, and develop in an environment that is safe, respectful, and free from abuse, harassment, or exploitation. These rights include:

- ǒ The right to be treated with respect: Athletes must know they are entitled to be treated with dignity by coaches, staff, and their peers, regardless of their performance or status.
- ǒ The right to personal safety: Every athlete has the right to feel safe physically, emotionally, and psychologically in their sports environment.
- ǒ The right to set personal boundaries: Athletes should be educated on the importance of setting and maintaining personal boundaries. They have the right to refuse any behavior or physical contact that makes them uncomfortable.
- ǒ The right to report: Athletes must be made aware that they have the right to report any form of misconduct, and that reporting mechanisms are confidential and available without fear of retaliation.

Athletes must also be trained to identify situations where their safety, rights, or personal boundaries are at risk. Many instances of abuse begin with subtle warning signs that athletes may not recognize. Educational programs should focus on helping athletes develop the ability to spot potential red flags, including:

- ǒ Grooming behaviors: Grooming often starts with seemingly innocent gestures or attention, such as giving gifts, special treatment, or excessive praise. Over time, these actions may escalate to more inappropriate behaviors. Athletes must be taught to recognize when someone is crossing personal boundaries and understand that these behaviors could be the start of grooming for exploitation.
- ǒ Inappropriate physical contact: While physical contact is often a part of sports, athletes need to be able to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate touch. Any physical contact that feels uncomfortable, unnecessary, or overly personal should be identified as a red flag.

- ǒ Manipulative or coercive behavior: If a coach, staff member, or peer is pressuring an athlete to engage in behavior that feels wrong or uncomfortable, athletes should be trained to recognize this manipulation and understand that it is a violation of their rights.
- ǒ Isolation tactics: Predators often attempt to isolate their victims from their peers, either emotionally or physically. Athletes should be aware of attempts to separate them from their support networks, such as being asked to spend time alone with a coach or being discouraged from speaking to teammates or family.

Furthermore, one of the most important aspects of these educational programs is encouraging athletes to speak openly about any concerns they may have. Many athletes may feel hesitant to report issues, either because they fear repercussions or because they don't fully understand that what they are experiencing is wrong. Programs should promote a culture of open communication where athletes feel comfortable discussing anything that makes them feel unsafe. Additionally, peer support networks can be established, allowing athletes to confide in and support each other. In addition, these programs must also ensure athletes know where to turn for help if they find themselves in unsafe situations. This may include, but not be limited to:

- ǒ Clear reporting mechanisms: Athletes should be provided with detailed information on how to report concerns or incidents of abuse. Reporting systems must be confidential, easy to access, and supportive of the athlete throughout the process.
- ǒ Access to safeguarding officers: Safeguarding officers should be introduced to athletes as the primary point of contact for any concerns. Athletes need to know that these officers are there to protect their well-being and will act in their best interest.
- ǒ Support services: Athletes should be informed about available support services, such as counselling, legal advice, or medical assistance. Knowing that these resources exist can provide reassurance and make athletes more likely to come forward if something happens.

Lastly, these programs must focus on building a culture of self-advocacy. Athletes should be encouraged to stand up for their own rights and those of their peers. This includes having the confidence to say no to uncomfortable situations, to report when something is wrong, and to support teammates who may also be facing unsafe circumstances. Self-advocacy is key to ensuring that athletes feel empowered to protect themselves. By instilling the belief that their voice matters, educational programs help athletes take ownership of their safety and foster a collective responsibility within teams to maintain a safe and respectful environment.

Parent and Community Involvement

Parent and community involvement are crucial in safeguarding sports, especially for younger athletes. The RISE team highlights that while coaches and staff are central, the support of parents and the broader community is equally important in reinforcing safety measures. Active participation from families helps create a protective framework that extends beyond the sports facility and parents are uniquely positioned to observe changes in their children's

behavior, which may signal issues. By staying informed, they become vital partners in identifying risks and addressing concerns early. Additionally, the RISE team stresses that when communities, including schools and local services, are involved, safeguarding becomes a shared responsibility, rather than relying solely on sports organizations. Involving parents and the community promotes transparency, accountability, and trust. It fosters open communication, ensuring athletes feel supported and that concerns about misconduct are addressed quickly. This collective approach reduces risks and creates a safer sports environment. To achieve this, organizations must engage families and communities in safeguarding efforts, educating them about risks, and providing guidance on contributing to athlete safety, as emphasized by the RISE team.

In particular, parents should be educated on key safeguarding principles, such as recognizing signs of abuse, understanding the importance of boundaries, and knowing how to respond if their child discloses concerns, and these education programs can take the form of workshops, informational sessions, or written materials, all designed to help them understand the potential risks their children may face in sports environments. As such, these programs should also emphasize the importance of communication between parents and their children. Additionally, parents should be made aware of the sports organization's safeguarding policies, reporting mechanisms, and procedures for addressing misconduct. When parents understand the safeguards that are in place, they are better equipped to contribute to their child's safety and can work in partnership with coaches and staff to ensure a positive and secure sports experience. In addition, building strong, transparent relationships between parents and coaches is another critical component of engaging families in safeguarding. Coaches play a significant role in athletes' lives, often spending more time with athletes than their parents during the sports season. As a result, it's essential for parents to have confidence in the coaches' ability to prioritize the safety and well-being of their children and this can be achieved through regular meetings, check-ins, or parent-coach conferences. Parents should be kept informed about their child's progress, any concerns that arise, and any changes in training routines or procedures that may impact their child's safety. In this sense, parents should feel comfortable approaching coaches with questions or concerns, and coaches should be responsive and proactive in addressing any issues that arise.

Furthermore, sports organizations should create structured opportunities for parental involvement in safeguarding efforts. The RISE team emphasizes that parents can participate in various aspects, such as volunteering, helping with travel arrangements, or serving on safeguarding committees. These roles allow parents to be present and engaged, adding an extra layer of oversight and accountability. Lastly, safeguarding athletes also requires support from the broader community. Local organizations and schools can play a crucial role in ensuring athletes' safety. The RISE team stresses that partnerships with these stakeholders can expand safeguarding efforts. Schools can educate athletes on safeguarding, while health services provide mental and physical health resources for those affected by abuse or misconduct. Engaging families and communities in safeguarding measures promotes a culture of accountability and transparency. When parents and community members are involved,

there is greater oversight, encouraging athletes to speak out about concerns. This culture ensures that misconduct is swiftly reported and addressed, with multiple layers of monitoring in place, as highlighted by the RISE team. In addition to fostering this environment of accountability, another key strategy for preventing abuse, harassment, and misconduct in sports is bystander intervention training.

Bystander Intervention Training

The RISE team emphasizes that bystander intervention training is a powerful tool that empowers individuals, whether athletes, coaches, staff, or spectators to step in and address inappropriate behaviors as they occur. By teaching people how to recognize early warning signs of misconduct and providing them with the skills and confidence to act, this training transforms passive witnesses into active protectors of a safe sports environment. In many cases of abuse or harassment, there are bystanders present who may witness concerning behaviors but are unsure how to intervene. Unfortunately, some of these individuals often remain silent, either out of fear, uncertainty, or a belief that someone else will handle the situation. However, their inaction can allow harmful behaviors to escalate unchecked. Bystander intervention training aims to break this cycle by promoting a culture of responsibility and action, where everyone is accountable for maintaining a safe and respectful environment, whether by directly addressing inappropriate behavior, distracting the involved parties, or seeking help from authority figures. Importantly, the training emphasizes that interventions can be safe and non-confrontational, ensuring that bystanders feel comfortable stepping in even in sensitive situations.

The RISE team emphasizes that bystander intervention creates a community of protectors, encouraging individuals to take collective responsibility for the well-being of all participants in the sports environment. By fostering this sense of shared accountability, organizations can effectively prevent incidents of abuse, harassment, and other inappropriate behaviors before they escalate, contributing to a culture of safety and respect across all levels of sport. By training people to take action in situations that might otherwise go unchecked, organizations create a proactive culture of safety, where the responsibility for maintaining a respectful environment is shared by everyone.

1. Understanding the Role of the Bystander

At the heart of bystander intervention is the concept that everyone is responsible for preventing misconduct, not just coaches, staff, or designated officials. Athletes, teammates, spectators, and even parents are often in a position to observe inappropriate behavior before it escalates into something more serious. This behavior can range from verbal harassment, bullying, and inappropriate physical contact to more severe instances of abuse or exploitation. However, bystanders frequently fail to act due to what is known as the “bystander effect,” where individuals are less likely to intervene in a problematic situation if others are present. They might assume someone else will take action, or they may fear negative consequences for stepping in. Bystander intervention training helps overcome these

barriers by teaching individuals that they can, and should, play an active role in preventing harm.

2. Recognizing Inappropriate Behaviors

Many instances of misconduct begin with seemingly minor actions that can escalate if not addressed early. Examples include:

- ǒ Inappropriate jokes or comments: These may seem harmless but can create a hostile or uncomfortable environment, particularly if they are sexist, racist, or sexually suggestive.
- ǒ Physical boundary violations: Unwanted touching or lingering physical contact can be an early sign of a potential escalation toward more serious abuse.
- ǒ Bullying or intimidation: Behaviors intended to humiliate or pressure others, whether between peers or from authority figures, should be seen as red flags.
- ǒ Excessive favoritism or one-on-one attention: When a coach or staff member singles out an athlete for special treatment or excessive private time, it could be a sign of grooming behavior.

By recognizing these behaviors early, bystanders can act before the situation worsens, protecting the well-being of all involved.

3. Overcoming Barriers to Intervention

One of the main objectives of bystander intervention training is to help individuals overcome the barriers that often prevent them from stepping in. These barriers might include fear of retaliation, concerns about misinterpreting the situation, or simply not knowing what to do. Therefore, these training programs may address these concerns by providing bystanders with clear, actionable strategies for intervening in different types of situations, such as:

- ǒ Assess the Situation: Bystanders are encouraged to assess whether a situation is truly inappropriate and if action is necessary. This includes determining if the behavior violates the organization's code of conduct or if it makes others feel uncomfortable.
- ǒ Safe Intervention Techniques: Training emphasizes that intervention doesn't always have to be direct or confrontational. There are several ways to intervene safely:
 - o Direct Intervention: When it's safe to do so, bystanders can directly address the person engaging in inappropriate behavior by calmly pointing out the issue and asking them to stop.
 - o Distraction: If direct confrontation feels unsafe or uncomfortable, bystanders can use distraction techniques to diffuse the situation, such as changing the subject, interrupting the behavior with a question, or redirecting the involved parties to focus on something else.
 - o Delegate: In situations where bystanders don't feel comfortable intervening themselves, they can seek help from someone in a position of authority, such as a coach, safeguarding officer, or referee.

4. Empowering bystanders with confidence and skills

Bystander intervention training not only teaches the mechanics of intervention but also builds the confidence needed to act. The RISE team emphasizes the importance of individuals understanding their role in safeguarding the community and trusting their instincts when something feels wrong. Role-playing scenarios are an effective tool in this aspect of training, allowing participants to practice responding to different situations in a safe and controlled environment. This can include intervening in peer conflicts, addressing boundary violations, or speaking up when they witness concerning behavior from authority figures. Repeated exposure to these scenarios helps bystanders feel more prepared and confident when encountering similar situations in real life, as highlighted by the RISE team.

5. Encouraging Collective Responsibility

Another key aspect of bystander intervention training is fostering a sense of collective responsibility within the sports community. When everyone understands that they have a role to play in maintaining a safe environment, it strengthens the overall culture of accountability. Training should emphasize that it is not solely the responsibility of coaches, safeguarding officers, or other designated leaders to prevent misconduct—everyone, from athletes to spectators, shares that responsibility. Creating a culture where intervention is the norm helps ensure that harmful behaviors are addressed quickly and effectively. This not only protects individuals from harm but also sets clear expectations for behavior within the community, as highlighted by the RISE team.

6. Promoting Positive Team Dynamics

Finally, bystander intervention training contributes to more positive team dynamics by encouraging open communication and mutual respect. When athletes, coaches, and staff feel empowered to speak out against inappropriate behavior, it fosters a team environment that prioritizes safety, inclusiveness, and respect. Teams that embrace bystander intervention are more likely to address issues early, preventing them from escalating and causing harm to team members.

6. Good Practices and Case Studies

Several sport governing bodies in Europe have established effective safeguarding policies that ensure the Safeguarding and well-being of athletes. These organizations have pioneered strategies to prevent abuse, harassment, and misconduct, making them leaders in the area of athlete safeguarding. Below are some notable examples of European sport governing bodies and their safeguarding policies, along with links to pertinent information.

1. The Football Association (FA) – England

Overview: The Football Association (FA) in England has been at the forefront of implementing safeguarding measures within football. Recognizing the unique vulnerability of young players, the FA has developed a comprehensive safeguarding strategy that covers clubs, players, coaches, and staff.

Key Features:

1. Football's safeguarding framework
2. Reporting concerns
3. Safer recruitment and DBS Checks
4. Safeguarding courses
5. The Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) network
6. Safeguarding in the digital world
7. Children and young people (under -18s)
8. Parents and carers
9. Support for adult survivors
10. Safeguarding adults in disability football
11. The complete downloads directory
12. Other key safeguarding organizations

Pertinent Link:

- ö [FA Safeguarding](#)

2. Fédération Française de Football (FFF) – France

Overview: The Fédération Française de Football (FFF) has implemented significant safeguarding measures to ensure a safe environment for athletes, particularly for young and vulnerable players. Their policies emphasize preventing sexual abuse, violence, and harassment within football.

Pertinent Link:

- ö [The FFF is mobilising to protect licence-holders](#)

3. UEFA (Union of European Football Associations)

Overview: UEFA, as the governing body for football in Europe, has implemented a continent-wide strategy to safeguard athletes across its member associations. UEFA promotes athlete Safeguarding, with a strong focus on anti-discrimination and preventing abuse.

Key Features:

- ǒ **Respect Campaign:** An ongoing initiative to promote respect and safety in football. It includes awareness campaigns targeting violence, harassment, and bullying.
- ǒ **Safeguarding Training:** Workshops and resources for national associations on best practices for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults in sport.
- ǒ **Clear Sanctions:** UEFA enforces strict penalties for violations of its safeguarding guidelines, ensuring that organizations take athlete safety seriously.

Pertinent Links:

- ǒ [UEFA Child Safeguarding Toolkit](#)
- ǒ [UEFA Safeguarding](#)

4. Sport England

Overview: Sport England, a public body working to develop grassroots sport, has a strong safeguarding policy in place to protect athletes of all ages. Their comprehensive approach includes creating safe environments for athletes while encouraging physical activity.

Key Features:

- ǒ **Safeguarding Code of Conduct:** Guidelines for all coaches, volunteers, and staff on maintaining appropriate behavior and ensuring athlete safety.
- ǒ **Training and Resources:** Extensive resources, including workshops, online training modules, and guidance documents to help organizations implement effective safeguarding policies.
- ǒ **Partnerships:** Collaborates with organizations like the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) to offer child Safeguarding training and consultation for sports clubs.

Pertinent Link:

- ǒ [Sport England Safeguarding](#)

5. British Gymnastics

Overview: British Gymnastics has taken a proactive approach to athlete safeguarding, particularly in light of recent reports of abuse within the sport. The organization has responded by implementing one of the most comprehensive safeguarding frameworks in the sport.

Key Features:

- ǒ **Gymnastics Safeguarding Policy:** A detailed policy addressing various forms of abuse, including sexual misconduct, emotional abuse, and bullying.
- ǒ **Mandatory Training:** All coaches, volunteers, and staff undergo mandatory safeguarding training and vetting processes.
- ǒ **Well-being Support:** British Gymnastics offers a support system for athletes who report abuse, including access to counseling services.

Pertinent Links:

- ǒ [British Gymnastics Safeguarding](#)
- ǒ [Gymnastics Code of Conduct and Discipline](#)

6. World Rugby Europe

Overview: World Rugby, governing rugby across Europe, has made safeguarding athletes a priority. Its "Safeguarding in Rugby" initiative ensures that all European member unions adopt best practices for athlete Safeguarding.

Key Features:

- ǒ **Code of Conduct:** Clear guidelines on appropriate behavior and interaction between coaches, players, and officials.
- ǒ **Safeguarding Education:** Provides safeguarding education for coaches, referees, and administrators to ensure they are equipped to prevent abuse.
- ǒ **Incident Reporting Procedures:** Clear and transparent reporting mechanisms for anyone who witnesses or experiences abuse.

Pertinent Links:

- ǒ [World Rugby Safeguarding](#)
- ǒ [World Rugby Europe](#)

7. National Olympic Committees (NOCs) in Europe

Overview: Many National Olympic Committees (NOCs) across Europe have adopted safeguarding policies in alignment with the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) safeguarding guidelines. Countries like Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands have been proactive in implementing athlete Safeguarding measures across all sports.

Key Features:

- ø **IOC SafeSport Guidelines:** NOCs implement these guidelines, ensuring athletes at all levels are protected from abuse.
- ø **Athlete Support Systems:** National Olympic Committees offer counseling and legal support for athletes who report misconduct.
- ø **Education Initiatives:** Many NOCs run regular educational programs on safeguarding, focusing on coaches, athletes, and parents.

Pertinent Link:

- ø [IOC Certificate: Safeguarding Officer in Sport](#)

8. Cyprus Sports Organization

Overview: The Cyprus Sports Organisation is the supreme sports authority of the Republic of Cyprus. It started its operation in 1969 with its headquarters in Nicosia. The semi-governmental organisation was established under the CSA Law of 1969.

Pertinent link:

- ø [Files and documents](#)

Lessons Learned from Cases of Sexual Violence in Sports

The sports sector has seen growing awareness around sexual violence, spurred by notable cases across different organizations, leagues, and disciplines worldwide. Acknowledging these cases helps in understanding how to create safer, healthier environments for athletes, coaches, and stakeholders. Drawing lessons from prominent cases offers invaluable insights for shaping effective policies, fostering open cultures, and enforcing safeguards to prevent future incidents.

1. Developing Robust Safeguarding Policies

In many high-profile cases, a lack of clear safeguarding policies enabled environments where misconduct went unchecked. The abuse cases involving USA Gymnastics, particularly the scandal surrounding former team doctor Larry Nassar, revealed significant lapses in policy and enforcement. Nassar's abuse went unreported for years, partly because the organization lacked rigorous, transparent mechanisms for reporting and investigating abuse claims (Mountjoy, et al., 2016). This case highlighted the importance of not only having safeguarding policies but also ensuring they are robust, clearly communicated, and enforced across all levels of the organization. Policies must outline reporting mechanisms, specify the consequences of misconduct, and require regular reviews to adapt to evolving needs and insights (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020).

2. Establishing Safe Reporting Channels

Victims of abuse often face substantial barriers when attempting to report incidents. In the case of UK football coach [Barry Bennell](#), several athletes were hesitant to report their

experiences, fearing retaliation or career damage. This case underscored the need for anonymous and supportive reporting channels, enabling athletes to speak out without fear (Lang & Hartill, 2015). Organizations must establish multiple reporting avenues—such as anonymous hotlines or third-party reporting platforms—that are independent of sports bodies and free from conflicts of interest (Kerr & Stirling, 2008). Empowering athletes, especially minors, to report abuse safely and confidently is crucial in fostering a transparent, accountable environment.

3. Ensuring Third-Party Oversight

Internal biases can sometimes impede justice when allegations surface, as shown by the case within the Canadian national skiing community, where coach Bertrand Charest faced multiple accusations of abuse. The case demonstrated how organizations may inadvertently protect their own interests or be ill-equipped to manage investigations impartially. External oversight, provided by independent third parties, helps to ensure that investigations are conducted fairly and without interference (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014). By instituting independent safeguarding bodies, sports organizations can demonstrate a commitment to impartiality, ensuring cases are handled objectively, and that justice is prioritized over reputation.

4. Prioritizing Education and Awareness

In several cases, a lack of awareness among athletes, coaches, and officials has contributed to the persistence of abusive environments. For instance, the investigation into allegations in [Australian Swimming](#) exposed the lack of awareness regarding boundaries and consent among both coaches and young athletes. Training on sexual violence prevention, boundary setting, and recognizing abusive behavior is essential for all stakeholders in sports (Vertommen, et al., 2016). Regular workshops and educational sessions can instill a culture of respect and vigilance, equipping athletes and coaches to identify and report inappropriate behavior before it escalates. Furthermore, embedding consent and safeguarding modules into coaching certifications can ensure new coaches are well-prepared to foster safe environments (Lang & Hartill, 2015).

5. Building a Culture of Trust and Transparency

In cases such as the [abuse within French figure skating](#), athletes often feared speaking up due to hierarchical power structures and potential career repercussions. This example highlights the need for sports organizations to nurture a culture of openness, where athletes feel valued and respected beyond their performance capabilities (Roberts, 2010). Leaders within sports teams and organizations should emphasize that athlete well-being is paramount. Clear communication from leadership, regular check-ins, and visible support from authorities create an atmosphere where athletes feel secure in raising concerns. Furthermore, transparency regarding disciplinary actions taken against offenders can reassure athletes and the public of the organization's commitment to safety (Brackenridge, 2001).

6. Strengthening Background Checks and Vetting Processes

Several cases of abuse could have been prevented by rigorous background checks. For instance, within the Irish youth sports leagues, inadequate vetting allowed some individuals with a history of misconduct to work with minors (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014). A strong vetting process, including comprehensive background checks, reference checks, and periodic re-evaluations, is essential. This process should extend to all positions of authority and influence within sports organizations, including volunteers, and be periodically reassessed to account for changing legal and social standards (Kerr & Stirling, 2012).

7. Offering Psychological Support and Counseling

Many survivors of abuse in sports suffer long-term emotional and psychological impacts. Cases within USA gymnastics revealed that athletes who experienced abuse often struggled with mental health issues but were left unsupported. Providing access to counseling and psychological support services for athletes, particularly after traumatic events, helps survivors cope with their experiences (Parent & Bannon, 2012). In addition, ongoing mental health resources can benefit all athletes by addressing stress, burnout, and other challenges common in competitive sports. Ensuring these resources are accessible, well-publicized, and encouraged by coaches and leaders contributes to a healthier, more supportive environment (Roberts, 2010).

8. Empowering Athletes and Advocating Athlete Representation

In the wake of the Nassar case, one key change in USA Gymnastics was the formation of athlete councils and the involvement of athletes in decision-making. Including athlete representatives on governing bodies and disciplinary committees promotes accountability and ensures that athlete welfare remains a core focus (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020). Athlete advocacy groups are essential voices in safeguarding efforts, offering insight into how policies impact athletes and identifying areas where further Safeguarding may be needed.

Learning from past cases of sexual violence in sports reveals both the vulnerabilities in traditional structures and the steps necessary to address these issues. To build a safe and healthy sports environment, organizations must implement rigorous policies, prioritize transparency, ensure independent oversight, and foster a culture of respect. Education, psychological support, and representation empower athletes to speak up and secure a lasting culture of safety in sports. These measures, learned from hard-won lessons, can form the foundation of a proactive and resilient approach to safeguarding in sports.

7. Monitoring and Evaluating Safeguarding Programs

Measuring the Effectiveness of Policies

Evaluating the effectiveness of policies in sports is crucial for ensuring safeguarding, safety, and health initiatives achieve their intended outcomes. The RISE team emphasizes that policies such as anti-harassment regulations, safeguarding protocols, and inclusion guidelines need consistent monitoring to gauge their impact, identify areas for improvement, and support ongoing development. Without measurement mechanisms, it's difficult to determine

whether policies prevent harm and promote a positive sports environment (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020).

To measure policy effectiveness, sports organizations can use several methods. One approach is conducting periodic audits to assess compliance with guidelines and the quality of program implementation (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Audits help identify strengths and gaps, while involving both internal and external auditors provide a balanced view. In addition, stakeholder feedback is another critical component. Input from athletes, coaches, parents, and others reveals the real-world impact of policies (Kerr & Stirling, 2008). Surveys, interviews, and focus groups can collect this valuable feedback, helping to understand how policies function in practice. As such, data collection and analysis are essential as well. Tracking the frequency and nature of safeguarding incidents over time can indicate policy effectiveness. A decrease in incidents and an increase in safe reporting can suggest that policies are fostering a safer environment (Lang & Hartill, 2015). On the other hand, if incidents increase without clear justification, further adjustments may be needed.

Finally, benchmarking against established standards, such as the International Olympic Committee's guidelines on athlete safeguarding, allows organizations to assess their policies against best practices (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Comparisons with similar organizations or countries can offer actionable insights for improvement. In conclusion, the RISE team stresses that measuring policy effectiveness requires a comprehensive approach, including audits, feedback, data analysis, and benchmarking. These methods enable sports organizations to assess the impact of their policies and make evidence-based adjustments to ensure a safe and supportive environment.

Key Performance Indicators for Evaluating Policy Success

Effective monitoring and evaluation of safeguarding programs hinge on the establishment of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) tailored to the specific goals of the policy. KPIs provide measurable targets and benchmarks, enabling sports organizations to assess whether safeguarding initiatives are functioning as intended and where improvements may be needed. Identifying appropriate KPIs for safeguarding is a nuanced process, as metrics must balance quantitative data with qualitative insights to capture the complexities of safeguarding in sports (Vertommen et al., 2016).

Incident Reporting Rate

A foundational KPI in safeguarding evaluation is the rate of incident reporting. Tracking the number and frequency of safeguarding incidents reported can provide insights into both the effectiveness of the policy and the organizational culture surrounding reporting. An increase in reports may suggest that athletes and staff feel more comfortable coming forward, indicating trust in the reporting mechanisms (Kerr & Stirling, 2008). Alternatively, low reporting rates could signal either a safe environment or, conversely, a lack of trust in or awareness of the reporting system, highlighting the need for further investigation.

Resolution Time for Reported Cases

Furthermore, the speed at which reported cases are addressed and resolved is another crucial KPI. A shorter resolution time often reflects an efficient and responsive safeguarding team, demonstrating commitment to addressing concerns quickly and transparently. Delays in resolution, however, can indicate procedural issues, such as bureaucratic delays or insufficient resources, that need to be addressed to ensure cases are managed swiftly and sensitively (Brackenridge et al., 2007).

Stakeholder Satisfaction and Trust Levels

In addition, measuring satisfaction and trust among stakeholders —especially athletes, parents, and coaches— can provide a deeper understanding of how policies are perceived. Satisfaction surveys and trust assessments gauge whether stakeholders believe the organization is committed to maintaining a safe environment and is responsive to safeguarding concerns. High satisfaction and trust scores suggest that stakeholders feel supported, while low scores may indicate the need for improved communication or policy reinforcement (Roberts, 2010).

Policy Compliance Rate

Assessing compliance with safeguarding procedures, such as adherence to mandatory training or protocol completion rates, is a KPI that measures both the implementation and acceptance of policies. Tracking attendance at safeguarding training sessions or evaluating coaches' adherence to guidelines can reveal the level of buy-in from staff and stakeholders (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Consistent compliance suggests policies are being integrated into everyday practice, while low compliance may highlight areas for additional training or policy reinforcement.

Repeat Incidence of Safeguarding Violations

Another critical KPI is the incidence of repeated safeguarding violations within the organization. Tracking the recurrence of specific types of incidents can indicate whether initial responses were effective or if additional preventative measures are needed. For instance, if a certain type of misconduct continues to reappear, this may point to underlying cultural or structural issues that require attention (Vertommen et al., 2016).

Qualitative Feedback on Policy Impact

While quantitative metrics are invaluable, qualitative feedback—gathered through interviews, focus groups, and open-ended survey questions—adds context to safeguarding KPIs. Direct feedback allows stakeholders to express concerns, suggest improvements, and discuss how policies have impacted their experiences. Qualitative data are especially useful for uncovering subtle barriers to policy effectiveness, such as fear of retaliation or perceived lack of confidentiality in reporting processes (Parent & Bannon, 2012).

Comparative Analysis with External Standards

Lastly, comparing safeguarding outcomes against recognized benchmarks, such as the Safe Sport International standards, helps organizations understand their performance relative to best practices. This comparative approach can reveal both areas of strength and potential gaps in policies, guiding ongoing improvements (Lang & Hartill, 2015). In conclusion, defining and tracking KPIs provides a systematic approach to evaluating safeguarding policies in sports. By focusing on incident reporting, resolution time, stakeholder satisfaction, compliance, and repeat incidents, along with incorporating qualitative feedback and external comparisons, organizations can achieve a nuanced, thorough understanding of their policies' impact. These KPIs offer a pathway for evidence-based adjustments and continuous improvement, ensuring safeguarding programs effectively protect and support all individuals in the sporting environment.

Feedback Mechanisms for Continuous Improvement in Sports

In sports, creating a safe and healthy environment requires policies that adapt and evolve based on feedback from those directly impacted. Effective feedback mechanisms allow sports organizations to continually refine safeguarding policies, enhance athlete welfare, and adapt to emerging needs. Feedback systems are integral to identifying potential areas of improvement and ensuring that safeguarding programs remain relevant, transparent, and effective. In the high-stakes, dynamic environment of sports, feedback offers insights from athletes, coaches, and stakeholders, which are crucial for a resilient and responsive system.

1. Importance of Feedback in Sports Environments

Feedback mechanisms help sports organizations remain responsive to the needs of their community. In contexts where athlete welfare, inclusivity, and safeguarding are paramount, effective feedback enables early detection of issues, ensures policies remain relevant, and fosters a culture of continuous improvement. According to Mountjoy et al. (2016), incorporating feedback not only mitigates risks but also strengthens trust within sports communities, as athletes and stakeholders feel that their voices are valued and impactful. As policies evolve to improve safety, feedback allows organizations to assess their effectiveness in real-world applications, providing insights that are not always apparent through formal evaluations alone.

2. Types of Feedback Mechanisms

Feedback in sports can be collected through various channels, each serving unique functions. Some of the most commonly used feedback mechanisms include:

1. **Anonymous Surveys:** Surveys allow athletes, parents, coaches, and staff to provide honest feedback on their experiences without fear of repercussions. For example, anonymous surveys regarding satisfaction with safeguarding protocols help identify trends in perceptions of safety and areas for improvement.
2. **Focus Groups:** Focus groups allow sports organizations to engage participants in in-depth discussions about policies and experiences. Focus groups are particularly

valuable when organizations seek nuanced insights or need to address complex issues such as power dynamics, coach-athlete relationships, and mental health.

3. Suggestion Boxes and Digital Portals: Physical suggestion boxes or online platforms offer an ongoing avenue for feedback submission. This flexibility allows stakeholders to provide feedback whenever they feel the need, contributing to a culture of openness and accessibility.
4. Exit Interviews: Exit interviews with athletes, coaches, or other staff leaving an organization can provide critical insights. They often feel freer to speak openly about their experiences, which can highlight systemic issues that may not surface through other feedback mechanisms.
5. Reporting Hotlines and Whistleblowing Channels: Confidential reporting channels encourage athletes to raise concerns about potential safeguarding violations. While primarily designed for safeguarding incidents, they can also serve as indirect feedback on policy effectiveness if concerns arise repeatedly in specific areas.

3. Creating a Feedback-Friendly Culture

For feedback mechanisms to be effective, sports organizations must cultivate a culture that values and respects the input of all stakeholders. If athletes and coaches feel safe and supported by providing honest feedback, the information gathered will be more authentic and reflective of their experiences. This requires open communication from leaders, who should actively invite feedback and demonstrate how it influences policy and practice (Kerr & Stirling, 2008). Additionally, organizations must ensure confidentiality and Safeguarding for those providing feedback, especially in areas related to safeguarding. Fear of reprisal is a significant barrier to open feedback, and organizations must communicate their commitment to confidentiality and anti-retaliation measures. Demonstrating the visible impact of feedback also fosters trust, as stakeholders see that their input is taken seriously and translated into tangible change.

4. Challenges and Considerations in Feedback Collection

Feedback collection in sports can be challenging due to power imbalances, concerns over anonymity, and cultural differences. Coaches, for instance, hold significant influence over athletes, which can hinder open feedback if athletes fear negative consequences for their input. Overcoming these challenges requires creating multiple feedback channels, providing anonymity where necessary, and emphasizing the organization's commitment to respectful, inclusive dialogue. Moreover, cultural sensitivity is crucial in sports, where teams and organizations are often diverse. Feedback mechanisms should be designed to respect and accommodate cultural differences, ensuring that all athletes feel comfortable and encouraged to participate. Addressing these challenges proactively can strengthen feedback mechanisms and improve their effectiveness.

5. Using Feedback for Continuous Improvement

Once collected, feedback must be analyzed and acted upon to drive continuous improvement. Organizations should regularly review feedback data to identify patterns and prioritize issues

that require immediate attention. Using feedback to revise policies, adjust training programs, and introduce new support resources demonstrates a commitment to athlete welfare and organizational improvement. Feedback should not merely be collected but should serve as the foundation for a cyclical process of evaluation, adjustment, and reinforcement.

How to Collect and Incorporate Feedback from Athletes and Stakeholders

Gathering feedback from athletes and stakeholders is an essential part of maintaining a responsive, supportive environment in sports. Effective feedback collection involves choosing suitable methods, establishing trust, and ensuring that all feedback is addressed and incorporated into continuous improvements. Feedback should be seen as part of a dynamic, ongoing process where all stakeholders feel their voices contribute to shaping a safe, supportive environment (Parent & Bannon, 2012).

1. Methods of Collecting Feedback

1. **Surveys and Questionnaires:** Surveys allow for broad, efficient data collection, especially when tailored to specific groups within the sports community. Questions should be crafted carefully to invite open-ended responses where appropriate, as well as closed-ended questions to quantify experiences.
2. **One-on-One Interviews:** Personalized interviews with athletes, coaches, and other stakeholders allow for in-depth feedback collection. One-on-one interviews are particularly useful for sensitive topics, as participants may feel more comfortable discussing their experiences privately.
3. **Observation and Informal Feedback:** Informal feedback, gathered through casual conversations or direct observations by coaching staff and administrators, provides insights that may not be captured in formal feedback mechanisms. Observation is particularly valuable in detecting subtle issues, such as dynamics in group interactions or signs of athlete distress.
4. **Digital Feedback Platforms:** Online platforms offer a streamlined, accessible way for athletes and stakeholders to submit feedback at any time. These platforms can be equipped with privacy settings, enabling anonymous submissions while ensuring the organization receives ongoing input.

2. Ensuring Confidentiality and Safety in Feedback Collection

Feedback mechanisms must guarantee confidentiality, especially when addressing safeguarding or sensitive issues. Providing anonymous options helps athletes and stakeholders speak openly without fearing repercussions. Organizations should be transparent about who will have access to the feedback and how it will be used, clearly communicating confidentiality measures to reassure participants. Additionally, offering feedback opportunities regularly and reinforcing the message that feedback is valued can create a culture of openness. When athletes and staff observe that their feedback results in positive changes, they are more likely to participate in future feedback processes, fostering a stronger feedback loop.

3. Analyzing and Prioritizing Feedback

After feedback is collected, it must be systematically reviewed to identify trends and prioritize action areas. For example, if feedback indicates recurring issues with training protocols or concerns over safety, these areas should be given priority in policy review and revisions. Analyzing feedback over time also allows organizations to measure the impact of changes and assess whether issues previously identified have improved.

- ǒ Quantitative Analysis: Using quantitative tools, such as statistical analysis of survey responses, helps to gauge the prevalence of certain experiences or perspectives. Quantitative data can help organizations spot trends across teams, age groups, or demographics.
- ǒ Qualitative Analysis: Qualitative feedback, often collected through interviews or open-ended survey responses, should be coded and analyzed thematically. Qualitative insights provide context to the numbers and can uncover nuanced areas for improvement, such as communication gaps or team culture issues.

4. Incorporating Feedback into Policy and Practice

Feedback should be integrated into policy and practice through a structured approach. For instance, if feedback indicates dissatisfaction with reporting mechanisms, organizations might review these processes, make adjustments, and communicate the changes clearly to all stakeholders. Feedback might also inform the development of new resources or training programs, particularly in areas where knowledge gaps have been identified (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020).

5. Creating a Feedback Cycle for Continuous Improvement

Incorporating feedback is not a one-time task; it should be part of an ongoing feedback cycle that continually reassesses policies and programs. Organizations can establish an annual review process where all feedback from the previous year is evaluated, and outcomes are publicly shared with stakeholders. This cyclical approach not only addresses current issues but also allows sports organizations to adapt proactively to evolving challenges, maintaining a healthy, safe environment for all.

Periodic Reviews and Policy Adjustments in Sports

In the field of sports, the effectiveness of policies, particularly safeguarding and athlete welfare policies, relies heavily on their adaptability and responsiveness to emerging issues. Periodic reviews and policy adjustments are crucial to ensuring that these policies remain relevant, effective, and aligned with the evolving landscape of sports, where new challenges and risks can emerge. Reviewing policies regularly not only helps in identifying and mitigating risks but also fosters an organizational culture that prioritizes continuous improvement and the welfare of athletes.

1. Importance of Periodic Reviews in Sports Policy

Periodic policy reviews are essential to maintaining the safety and well-being of all participants in the sports environment. Reviews serve as an opportunity to evaluate the

current policy landscape, assess policy effectiveness, and align policies with updated research and evolving legal standards. For example, in light of increased awareness regarding mental health and abuse in sports, policies related to athlete welfare need regular assessment to address new findings and legal considerations (Mountjoy et al., 2016). A lack of periodic reviews can lead to outdated or inadequate policies that fail to protect athletes. For instance, the case of USA Gymnastics revealed systemic safeguarding failures that could have been mitigated through regular review and adjustment of policies (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020). Consequently, the need for continuous evaluation has become a priority for organizations committed to a safe and healthy sports environment. These reviews allow sports organizations to assess whether the policies in place are achieving their objectives, protecting stakeholders effectively, and meeting the needs of athletes and staff.

2. Components of an Effective Policy Review Process

An effective policy review process in sports involves several essential components, each playing a role in the systematic evaluation and potential modification of policies.

- ǒ Data Collection and Analysis: Gathering data on the application and outcomes of policies is fundamental to assessing their effectiveness. Information on reported incidents, complaint resolution times, compliance rates, and satisfaction levels among athletes and coaches provides valuable insights (Parent & Bannon, 2012).
- ǒ Feedback from Stakeholders: Feedback from athletes, coaches, administrators, and other stakeholders is crucial in understanding the real-world impact of policies. Stakeholders' experiences with policies often highlight issues that may not be visible in data alone. Incorporating their perspectives helps ensure policies are practical, effective, and well-understood.
- ǒ Benchmarking Against Industry Standards: Comparing policies with industry standards, such as the Safe Sport International guidelines or the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) safeguarding standards, offers a frame of reference. This benchmarking process reveals areas where an organization's policies may be falling short or excelling, allowing for targeted improvements (Mountjoy et al., 2016).
- ǒ Review of Incident and Compliance Trends: Trends in incidents, compliance, and disciplinary actions can provide significant insights into areas where policies may require adjustment. For instance, if specific types of incidents are consistently reported, it could indicate a policy gap or an area where training and awareness need to be strengthened.

3. Challenges in Conducting Periodic Reviews

While periodic reviews are necessary, they also pose challenges. Time and resource constraints can make regular reviews difficult, especially for smaller sports organizations with limited administrative capacity. Moreover, policy reviews may encounter resistance from stakeholders who are accustomed to established practices and reluctant to embrace changes. Addressing these challenges requires a clear commitment from leadership, adequate allocation of resources, and transparent communication about the importance of policy

updates (Kerr & Stirling, 2008). Another challenge is maintaining objectivity in the review process, as stakeholders directly involved in policy implementation may have biases that impact the analysis. Utilizing external auditors or consultants can provide an impartial assessment, ensuring that reviews are thorough and unbiased.

4. The Role of Technology in Policy Review

Technology can greatly facilitate periodic reviews, particularly through data collection and analysis tools. Digital platforms for incident reporting and feedback collection streamline data management, allowing organizations to assess policy effectiveness in real-time. Moreover, advancements in analytics enable organizations to detect trends, analyze compliance rates, and benchmark effectively. Many sports organizations now use online feedback portals, incident tracking systems, and compliance software to facilitate the regular review of safeguarding policies (Vertommen et al., 2016).

5. Steps for Implementing Policy Adjustments Post-Review

Once a review is complete, the process of implementing policy adjustments begins. Clear communication of updates is essential to ensure all stakeholders understand and comply with the revised policies. Organizations should develop a plan for training staff, coaches, and athletes on any new protocols and assess understanding through periodic quizzes or refresher sessions. Additionally, setting a timeline for subsequent reviews ensures that adjustments are monitored for effectiveness, facilitating continuous improvement. Furthermore, these periodic reviews and policy adjustments are integral to fostering safe, adaptable sports environments. By systematically evaluating policy effectiveness, gathering feedback, benchmarking, and utilizing technology, sports organizations can ensure their policies evolve to meet the challenges of an ever-changing landscape, ultimately enhancing athlete welfare and organizational integrity.

Guidelines for Regularly Updating Safeguarding Measures

Safeguarding in sports requires a proactive approach, with policies that are regularly updated to keep pace with emerging risks and best practices. Regularly updating safeguarding measures is not only a matter of compliance but also of maintaining trust and ensuring the ongoing safety of athletes and participants. Developing clear guidelines for these updates can help sports organizations remain agile and responsive, creating a robust safeguarding framework that adapts to the evolving needs of the sports community.

1. Establishing a Review Schedule

Setting a formal schedule for policy reviews ensures that safeguarding measures are revisited consistently. Many organizations adopt an annual review cycle, while others may opt for bi-annual reviews depending on the complexity of their programs. Regular intervals allow policies to remain current with legal requirements and industry standards, such as the IOC's safeguarding framework or country-specific child Safeguarding laws (Mountjoy et al., 2016).

A structured review schedule also signals a commitment to safeguarding and fosters a culture of accountability.

2. Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback

Feedback from athletes, coaches, parents, and administrative staff should be a cornerstone of safeguarding policy updates. Athletes, in particular, are often the first to experience any weaknesses in safeguarding practices, making their insights invaluable for policy development. Methods for gathering feedback include anonymous surveys, focus groups, and suggestion boxes. Incorporating these insights ensures that updates address real-world challenges and reflect the perspectives of those directly affected by safeguarding measures (Lang & Hartill, 2015).

3. Benchmarking Against Industry Standards

Benchmarking helps organizations assess their safeguarding policies relative to best practices in the field. Standards set by bodies such as Safe Sport International or the Child Safeguarding in Sport Unit in the UK provide valuable guidelines on effective safeguarding. Benchmarking highlights areas for improvement and can uncover gaps in policy that internal reviews might miss (Parent & Bannon, 2012). By regularly comparing their policies with these benchmarks, organizations can maintain alignment with international best practices and enhance the credibility of their safeguarding measures.

4. Using Data to Drive Policy Updates

Data analysis plays a critical role in guiding safeguarding updates. Tracking incident reports, compliance rates, and outcomes of disciplinary actions may reveal trends and potential vulnerabilities in existing policies. For instance, if incidents are consistently reported within specific contexts—such as during away games or in particular training environments—this may indicate a need for targeted policy reinforcement or specialized training. Quantitative data analysis enables organizations to make evidence-based decisions, ensuring updates are tailored to address the most pressing safeguarding concerns (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020).

5. Adopting a Multi-Disciplinary Approach

Safeguarding encompasses a wide range of issues, from physical and emotional abuse to mental health and inclusivity. To comprehensively update safeguarding measures, a multi-disciplinary approach is essential, incorporating insights from experts in psychology, legal standards, child Safeguarding, and athletic coaching. This approach ensures that policy updates are holistic, addressing the various dimensions of athlete welfare (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014). Collaborating with professionals from different disciplines brings depth to the review process and helps ensure policies are well-rounded and robust.

6. Ensuring Compliance and Understanding of Updates

When safeguarding policies are updated, it is critical that all members of the organization understand and comply with the changes. Training sessions, workshops, and accessible written materials can aid in communicating updates effectively. Compliance tracking tools, such as digital checklists and periodic quizzes, can help monitor adherence to the updated

policies, reinforcing the importance of safeguarding protocols and identifying any areas where additional training may be necessary (Kerr & Stirling, 2008).

7. Leveraging Technology for Continuous Monitoring

Technology offers powerful tools for tracking and updating safeguarding measures. Online incident reporting systems, feedback platforms, and compliance software provide real-time data, allowing organizations to detect trends and vulnerabilities promptly. Automated notifications and reminders can be set up to alert staff when it is time for policy reviews or training refreshers. Additionally, analytics tools can assist in identifying high-risk areas and optimizing the frequency and focus of safeguarding reviews (Vertommen et al., 2016).

8. Establishing a Culture of Transparency and Accountability

Updating safeguarding measures is most effective in an organizational culture that values transparency and accountability. Clear communication about the purpose of policy updates, as well as the results of safeguarding reviews, builds trust among athletes and stakeholders. A culture of transparency also encourages athletes and staff to report issues, knowing that the organization takes safeguarding seriously and is committed to continuous improvement. Publicizing updates in newsletters, team meetings, and organizational websites helps reinforce this commitment (Roberts, 2010). In addition, regularly updating safeguarding measures through these guidelines ensures that sports organizations can respond effectively to new challenges, integrate feedback, and maintain compliance with best practices. With structured review schedules, a multi-disciplinary approach, and technology-enhanced monitoring, safeguarding policies can evolve to meet the dynamic needs of the sports community, protecting athletes and fostering a safe, inclusive environment.

8. Conclusion and Next Steps

Call to Action for Sports Organizations

In creating safe and healthy environments in sports, these sports organizations and the RISE team play a crucial role as advocates, enforcers, and champions of athlete welfare. The impact of implementing and upholding safeguarding policies and practices is significant, extending from individual athletes to the broader sports community and beyond. Ensuring athlete safety, promoting inclusivity, and fostering an environment free from harassment and abuse require ongoing commitment, resources, and organizational dedication.

1. Commitment to Safeguarding and Athlete Welfare

Sports organizations must establish safeguarding and athlete welfare as fundamental priorities. This commitment begins with leadership, requiring an executive-level endorsement and a willingness to allocate resources for developing and implementing effective policies. Therefore, leaders must communicate a clear message that safeguarding is not a secondary

consideration but an integral part of the organization's mission. When safeguarding is a central organizational value, it fosters an environment where policies can be consistently applied, monitored, and improved (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020). In addition, a strong commitment to athlete welfare includes the establishment of a dedicated safeguarding team, equipped with adequate training and authority to enforce safeguarding protocols. This team should work closely with coaches, athletes, parents, and other stakeholders to maintain transparency and build trust in the organization's safeguarding practices. Furthermore, establishing policies that prioritize mental health, prevent abuse, and encourage respectful behavior provides a holistic approach to athlete welfare that goes beyond physical safety.

2. Investing in Education and Training Programs

Education is a cornerstone of effective safeguarding. Sports organizations are encouraged to develop and implement comprehensive training programs for athletes, coaches, and administrators. These programs should cover topics such as recognizing signs of abuse, understanding reporting protocols, and fostering respectful, inclusive environments. Ensuring that everyone involved is well-informed on safeguarding policies not only reduces incidents but also promotes a culture of accountability where all participants understand their responsibilities and the training should be ongoing and adaptable, considering the dynamic nature of sports. For instance, as awareness of mental health issues grows, it is crucial that the organizations update training to address topics such as mental resilience, stress management, and peer support. Moreover, training for specific groups, such as younger athletes or athletes with disabilities, should be tailored to their unique needs, providing them with a safe platform to voice concerns and understand safeguarding practices.

3. Creating Accessible and Safe Reporting Mechanisms

Accessible reporting mechanisms are essential to ensuring athletes feel comfortable speaking up about concerns or incidents. Many high-profile cases of abuse in sports reveal that inadequate reporting channels can discourage athletes from coming forward (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Organizations must ensure reporting systems are confidential, easily accessible, and free from conflicts of interest. Channels such as anonymous online forms, hotlines, or third-party reporting services can provide athletes with a secure space to voice concerns. Additionally, organizations should actively encourage the use of these channels, reassuring athletes that their safety and well-being are paramount. Regular communication, such as reminders during team meetings or competitions, helps reinforce the importance of reporting and underscores the organization's commitment to addressing issues proactively.

4. Engaging Stakeholders in Safeguarding Initiatives

Effective safeguarding requires collaboration across all levels of the organization. This includes athletes, coaches, parents, administrators, and even sponsors. Involving stakeholders in safeguarding initiatives, such as feedback forums, policy reviews, and focus groups, allows organizations to benefit from diverse perspectives. Engaging stakeholders creates a sense of collective responsibility for maintaining a safe environment and encourages open dialogue about potential areas for improvement. For example, involving parents in

safeguarding workshops, inviting athlete representatives to sit on policy review committees, or holding periodic meetings with coaching staff can lead to valuable insights that shape more effective, responsive policies. Stakeholders who feel invested in safeguarding are more likely to support and advocate for policy adherence, creating a community that collectively upholds the organization's values.

5. Emphasizing Transparency and Accountability

In addition to the above, transparency and accountability are fundamental in building trust within the sports community. Sports organizations should openly communicate their safeguarding policies, share the outcomes of periodic reviews, and provide updates on any incidents or adjustments made. Regularly publishing safeguarding reports, whether annually or once every two years offers visibility into how the organization is addressing safeguarding and welfare. Accountability also means holding all members of the organization to the same standards, regardless of rank or role. Coaches, athletes, administrators, and board members must be equally accountable under safeguarding policies, fostering a culture of integrity and fairness. Consequences for non-compliance should be clear and applied consistently, signaling to all members that the organization is serious about safeguarding.

6. Leveraging Technology for Monitoring and Policy Improvement

Advances in technology offer new opportunities for monitoring and enhancing safeguarding practices. Digital platforms for tracking incidents, collecting feedback, and measuring policy adherence allow organizations to assess their safeguarding efforts in real-time. These tools provide valuable data that can inform policy adjustments and training updates, helping organizations stay agile and responsive to emerging challenges (Vertommen et al., 2016). Furthermore, sports organizations can utilize online learning platforms to deliver interactive safeguarding training, making it accessible to remote and part-time staff. Digital solutions, such as periodic surveys and compliance software, facilitate continuous monitoring, ensuring that safeguarding practices evolve alongside the organization's needs.

7. Fostering a Culture of Respect and Inclusion

A safe sports environment is inherently respectful and inclusive. To create such an environment, organizations must promote diversity, ensure fair treatment, and recognize the unique needs of all participants. This includes implementing policies against discrimination, supporting mental health initiatives, and promoting gender equity. A culture that values respect and inclusion help prevent harassment and abuse while strengthening the community's commitment to collective well-being. Organizations can implement initiatives like "respect in sports" programs, conduct diversity workshops, or offer mentorship programs to promote inclusivity and support athletes from diverse backgrounds. When athletes feel respected and valued, they are more likely to thrive, enhancing both individual and organizational success.

Encouraging the Adoption of Handbook Recommendations

For sports organizations, adopting the recommendations outlined in a safeguarding handbook represents a transformative step toward a safe and inclusive environment. However, to ensure that these guidelines are implemented effectively, organizations must approach adoption with strategic planning, organizational buy-in, and practical support for all stakeholders. Organizations can effectively adopt safeguarding recommendations by establishing clear goals and milestones, ensuring structured progress. Examples include mandatory training for all coaches, setting up confidential reporting channels, and providing mental health support. Securing buy-in at all levels is crucial, with executive leaders endorsing policies and integrating safeguarding into organizational goals. Coaches, athletes, and staff should understand the benefits, fostering trust and adherence. Furthermore, to streamline implementation, safeguarding guidelines should be embedded into existing practices, such as coaching certifications and administrative protocols. Regular training tailored to different roles, along with resources like policy guides and safeguarding officers, strengthens understanding and application. Accountability mechanisms, such as audits and progress evaluations, ensure compliance while fostering transparency, whereas any publicly reporting progress reinforces commitment and allows for community input. In addition, recognizing and celebrating achievements encourages engagement, reinforcing a culture of safeguarding. Highlighting successes through newsletters or awards motivates staff and athletes. Since safeguarding requires ongoing adaptation, organizations should remain flexible, reviewing and refining policies based on feedback and emerging challenges. By maintaining a proactive, structured, and evolving approach, organizations can create a lasting culture of athlete welfare and protection.

Resources for Further Support

For sports organizations, coaches, athletes, and parents seeking further guidance on safeguarding, athlete welfare, and safe sports practices, a range of organizations, websites, and hotlines are available globally. These resources provide valuable information, training, support, and assistance to help foster safe, inclusive, and respectful environments in sports.

Organizations

[Safe Sport International](#) (SSI)

Description: SSI is a global organization dedicated to the prevention of harassment, abuse, and violence in sports. They offer resources, events, and research on best practices in safeguarding across sports.

[International Olympic Committee \(IOC\) – Safe Sport](#)

Description: The IOC provides a range of safeguarding resources, including its "[Safeguarding Toolkit for International Federations](#)" and guidelines on safeguarding athletes from abuse.

[Child Safeguarding in Sport Unit \(CPSU\) – UK](#)

Description: A partnership between the NSPCC and UK sports councils, the CPSU offers extensive resources and training to support child Safeguarding in sports, including guidance for clubs and organizations on developing safeguarding policies.

[Sport England – Safeguarding in Sport](#)

Description: Sport England offers comprehensive safeguarding resources and policies to support sports organizations in creating safe environments, with guidelines for protecting young people and adults at risk.

Hotlines and Support Services

[Childline \(UK\)](#)

Phone: 0800 1111

Description: A free, confidential helpline for children and young people in the UK, offering support and advice on any issue, including abuse in sports.

[The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children \(NSPCC\) – Helpline \(UK\)](#)

Phone: 0808 800 5000

Description: NSPCC's helpline offers advice and support on safeguarding concerns, including abuse or welfare concerns related to children in sports.

[Kids Helpline \(Australia\)](#)

Phone: 1800 55 1800

Description: A national helpline offering 24/7 confidential counseling and support for children and young people on issues related to safety and abuse, with resources specific to the sports context.

European Resources for Safeguarding and Athlete Welfare

[European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\)](#)

Description: The FRA conducts research and provides guidelines on safeguarding practices across EU member states. They publish reports and resources on preventing violence, abuse, and exploitation in sports and other environments.

[European Organization for Grassroots sport](#)

Description: ENGSO advocates for equality and safeguarding in sports across Europe. Their Equality Within Sport Committee offers guidance on creating safe environments for vulnerable groups and works on projects related to child Safeguarding, inclusivity, and safeguarding practices.

[Council of Europe – Child Safeguarding in Sport](#)

Description: The Council of Europe promotes safeguarding through initiatives such as the “Start to Talk” campaign, which encourages action against child sexual abuse in sports. The Council provides policy recommendations, training resources, and guidelines for member states and sports organizations.

[Authority for Integrity in Maltese Sport \(AIMS\)](#)

Description: The Authority for Integrity in Maltese Sport has implemented a safeguarding policy framework aimed at protecting minors and vulnerable adults. They offer workshops, support services, and educational materials for sports organizations in Malta.

[Netherlands Olympic Committee - Netherlands Sports Federation \(NOCNSF\)](#)

Description: NOC*NSF’s Safe Sport Program provides resources and guidance to prevent abuse and violence in sports. The program includes educational materials, reporting channels, and policy templates for safeguarding of sports organizations in the Netherlands.

[Royal Belgium Football Association – Safe Together](#)

Description: The Safe Together programme aims to promote the safety and well-being of minors and vulnerable adults who participate in football activities organized and supervised by URBSFA, ACFF and Voetbal Vlaanderen.

[Sport Ireland – Safeguarding and Child Safeguarding](#)

Description: Sport Ireland oversees safeguarding initiatives and provides resources for clubs and organizations across Ireland. Their safeguarding workshops, policy guidelines, and reporting procedures are designed to promote child safety and prevent abuse in Irish sports.

These resources represent a diverse selection of European initiatives supporting the Safeguarding and welfare of athletes, especially children and vulnerable groups, across various sports contexts. They offer valuable guidance, training, and support, facilitating a safer and more inclusive environment for sports organizations throughout Europe.

9. Appendices

9.1 Sample Code of Conduct

This Sample Code of Conduct outlines the expectations for behavior and responsibilities of all members involved in [Organization Name] sports programs, including athletes, coaches, staff, volunteers, and spectators. This code is intended to foster a safe, respectful, and supportive environment for all participants.

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to ensure that all members of [Organization Name] contribute to an environment where everyone feels safe, valued, and respected. By upholding

these standards, we aim to promote integrity, inclusivity, and a commitment to athlete welfare within our sports programs.

2. Scope

This Code of Conduct applies to all members involved with [Organization Name], including athletes, coaches, volunteers, staff, parents, and spectators, during all activities, practices, competitions, and events associated with the organization.

3. General Principles

- ǒ Respect and Dignity: All members shall treat each other with respect, maintaining a positive and supportive attitude that values everyone's contributions and upholds the dignity of all individuals.
- ǒ Integrity: Members are expected to conduct themselves honestly, fairly, and transparently in all interactions.
- ǒ Inclusivity: Discrimination, harassment, bullying, and exclusionary behavior will not be tolerated under any circumstances. All individuals, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or background, are welcome and valued.
- ǒ Commitment to Safety: Safety is a priority in all activities. Members must take all reasonable measures to prevent injury, physical harm, or emotional distress and promptly report any concerns.

4. Code of Conduct for Athletes

- ǒ Respect for Teammates and Opponents: Athletes must respect their teammates, opponents, coaches, and officials, showing sportsmanship and cooperation in all situations.
- ǒ Commitment to Training and Competitions: Athletes are expected to give their best effort in all practices, games, and events, adhering to scheduled times and maintaining a positive attitude.
- ǒ Compliance with Rules and Regulations: Athletes shall follow all rules, instructions, and guidelines set forth by coaches, officials, and the organization.
- ǒ Substance-Free Participation: Use of drugs, alcohol, or performance-enhancing substances is strictly prohibited during all training and competitions.
- ǒ Reporting Concerns: Athletes are encouraged to report any concerns about their well-being, safety, or inappropriate behavior they experience or witness.

5. Code of Conduct for Coaches

- ǒ Prioritizing Athlete Welfare: Coaches shall prioritize the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of all athletes. This includes fostering a safe training environment and considering each athlete's unique needs and abilities.
- ǒ Promoting Fair Play and Respect: Coaches are responsible for modeling sportsmanship and respect for others, treating all athletes, officials, and colleagues fairly and without bias.

- ǒ Professional Boundaries: Coaches must maintain appropriate professional boundaries with athletes, avoiding any form of favoritism, inappropriate relationships, or exploitation.
- ǒ Commitment to Development: Coaches shall support the holistic development of athletes, promoting positive values such as teamwork, perseverance, and respect.
- ǒ Continuing Education: Coaches are expected to seek ongoing professional development and stay updated on best practices in coaching, safety, and safeguarding.

6. Code of Conduct for Staff and Volunteers

- ǒ Supportive Environment: Staff and volunteers shall contribute to a welcoming and safe environment for athletes, coaches, and other members.
- ǒ Respect for Roles and Responsibilities: Staff and volunteers must adhere to the specific duties and responsibilities associated with their role and support the organization's mission and values.
- ǒ Confidentiality: Personal and sensitive information regarding athletes and other members must be kept confidential and shared only with authorized individuals when necessary.
- ǒ Reporting and Accountability: Staff and volunteers shall report any observed or reported violations of this Code of Conduct or concerns related to safeguarding or safety to the appropriate authority within the organization.

7. Code of Conduct for Parents and Spectators

- ǒ Positive Support: Parents and spectators are encouraged to offer positive support to all athletes, demonstrating respect for coaches, officials, and other spectators.
- ǒ Encouraging Fair Play: Demonstrating and encouraging sportsmanship and respect for all participants is essential to maintaining a positive sporting environment.
- ǒ Respect for Boundaries: Parents and spectators should avoid interfering in coaching, training, or other organizational activities unless invited to participate.
- ǒ Responsibility to Report: Parents and spectators are encouraged to report any concerning behavior they observe, particularly concerning the welfare and safety of athletes.

8. Anti-Harassment and Anti-Bullying Policy

- ǒ Zero Tolerance for Harassment and Bullying: [Organization Name] has a zero-tolerance policy toward any form of bullying, harassment, discrimination, or abuse, whether verbal, physical, emotional, or cyber.
- ǒ Reporting Mechanism: All members are encouraged to report incidents of harassment or bullying through established, confidential reporting channels. Retaliation against anyone who reports harassment or participates in an investigation is strictly prohibited.

9. Disciplinary Actions

Failure to comply with this Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action, which may include, but not limited to:

- ǒ Warnings or temporary suspension
- ǒ Mandatory training or counselling
- ǒ Removal from activities or events
- ǒ Permanent expulsion from the organization, depending on the severity of the violation.

The organization reserves the right to investigate any reported violations thoroughly and take appropriate action to ensure the safety and well-being of all members.

10. Acknowledgment and Commitment

All members of [Organization Name] are required to review and acknowledge this Code of Conduct, committing to uphold its values and adhere to its guidelines. By doing so, members contribute to a safe, respectful, and positive environment that supports the success and welfare of all participants.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name (Printed): _____

This Sample Code of Conduct serves as a template for organizations to adapt to their specific needs, helping ensure a safe, inclusive, and supportive sports environment for all members involved.

9.2 Template for Reporting Incidents

This Template for Reporting Incidents is designed to assist members, including athletes, coaches, staff, parents, and volunteers, in reporting any concerns related to misconduct, safety, harassment, abuse, bullying, or other violations of the Code of Conduct. This form aims to provide a confidential and structured way to report incidents, ensuring that all concerns are documented and addressed appropriately by [Organization Name].

Template for Reporting Incidents

1. Basic Information

Date of Report Submission: _____

Date of Incident: _____

Time of Incident (if known): _____

Location of Incident: _____

2. Reporting Party's Information

Full Name: _____

Role (e.g., athlete, coach, parent, volunteer): _____

Contact Information:

Phone: _____

Email: _____

3. Person(s) Involved in the Incident

Please list the names and roles of all individuals involved in the incident.

Name of Individual(s) Involved:

Role/Relationship to Organization (e.g., athlete, coach, spectator):

4. Description of the Incident

Please provide a detailed description of the incident, including what happened, how it happened, and any specific actions or words that were exchanged. Include as much detail as possible to help with the investigation.

5. Type of Incident

Check all that apply to describe the nature of the incident:

- ☐ Harassment
- ☐ Bullying
- ☐ Physical Abuse
- ☐ Emotional Abuse
- ☐ Sexual Abuse or Misconduct
- ☐ Discrimination
- ☐ Safety Violation
- ☐ Policy Violation
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

6. Witnesses

If there were any witnesses to the incident, please provide their information below.

Name(s) of Witness(es):

Contact Information:

Phone/Email: _____

Relationship to Organization (e.g., athlete, coach, parent): _____

7. Supporting Evidence

Please list any evidence that may support this report, such as photos, videos, emails, text messages, or documents. Attach copies if possible.

Evidence Description:

8. Immediate Actions Taken

If any immediate actions were taken after the incident (such as notifying a supervisor or seeking medical attention), please provide details.

9. Desired Outcome

Please describe any action or outcome you feel would be appropriate or beneficial in response to this incident.

10. Confidentiality and Follow-Up

Do you wish to remain anonymous? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Preferred Method of Follow-Up (if not anonymous):

- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Email
- ☐ In-person meeting

Note: While every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality, please be aware that in some cases, certain information may need to be disclosed as part of a formal investigation.

11. Consent and Signature

By signing this form, you affirm that the information provided is accurate and complete to the best of your knowledge. You understand that this report will be handled in a confidential manner in accordance with [Organization Name]'s policies.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

For Official Use Only

1. Received By: _____

Position: _____

Date: _____

2. Initial Assessment

Severity of Incident: [] Low [] Moderate [] High

Immediate Actions Required (if any): _____

3. Assigned to: _____

Date: _____

4. Outcome of Investigation

Please provide a summary of actions taken, outcomes, and any follow-up measures or sanctions applied.

This template is designed to provide a standardized and accessible format for reporting incidents within [Organization Name]. It ensures that concerns are thoroughly documented, and appropriate actions can be taken in response to each report, fostering a safe and supportive environment for all members involved.

9.3 Checklist for Implementing Safeguarding Policies

This checklist provides a step-by-step guide for sports organizations to effectively implement safeguarding policies. It includes key actions and considerations to ensure policies are properly established, communicated, and adhered to, fostering a safe environment for all athletes, staff, volunteers, and stakeholders.

Checklist for Implementing Safeguarding Policies

1. Policy Development

Define Policy Objectives and Scope ☐

Clearly outline the purpose, goals, and scope of the safeguarding policy to address the safety and welfare needs of athletes, staff, and volunteers.

Consult Key Stakeholders ☐

Engage athletes, coaches, staff, parents, and safeguarding experts in the policy development process to ensure it addresses diverse perspectives and needs.

Align with Legal and Regulatory Standards ☐

Ensure the policy complies with national laws, international guidelines, and sports-specific safeguarding requirements, such as those from the IOC or Safe Sport organizations.

Incorporate Best Practices and Research ☐

Reference best practices in safeguarding, drawing on research, case studies, and guidelines from reputable organizations (e.g., Safe Sport International, Child Safeguarding in Sport Unit).

2. Policy Content

Clearly Define Prohibited Behaviors ☐

Outline unacceptable behaviors, including harassment, bullying, physical and emotional abuse, discrimination, and sexual misconduct.

Specify Roles and Responsibilities ☐

Identify the roles of all stakeholders in upholding safeguarding policies, including athletes, coaches, administrators, parents, and volunteers.

Establish Reporting Procedures ☐

Detail clear, accessible procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns, including multiple channels for confidential reporting.

Outline Response and Disciplinary Procedures ☐

Describe the investigation process, potential disciplinary actions, and timelines for resolving reported incidents.

Include Guidance on Boundaries and Professional Conduct ☐

Provide specific guidance on maintaining appropriate boundaries, particularly in coach-athlete relationships, and define expectations for professional conduct.

3. Policy Communication and Training

Develop a Communication Plan ☐

Create a strategy to communicate the safeguarding policy to all members of the organization, ensuring everyone is aware of its purpose, expectations, and reporting procedures.

Conduct Initial Training Sessions ☐

Hold mandatory training sessions for athletes, coaches, staff, and volunteers to familiarize them with the safeguarding policy, reporting procedures, and their roles in implementation.

Provide Ongoing Training ☐

Schedule regular refresher training sessions, incorporating updates to the policy or new safeguarding practices, to reinforce awareness and understanding.

Create Accessible Resources ☐

Develop handouts, online modules, or informational materials summarizing key aspects of the safeguarding policy, reporting options, and behavioral expectations.

Display Policy Information Publicly ☐

Post safeguarding information in easily visible areas (e.g., locker rooms, clubhouses) and on the organization's website to remind members of the policy and how to report concerns.

4. Appoint Safeguarding Officer(s)

Designate Trained Safeguarding Officers ☐

Appoint designated safeguarding officers within the organization who are trained to handle reports, offer guidance, and lead safeguarding initiatives.

Provide Specialized Training for Officers ☐

Ensure safeguarding officers receive advanced training on handling sensitive reports, conducting investigations, and supporting affected individuals.

Establish Clear Reporting Lines ☐

Define the reporting lines for safeguarding officers and clarify when cases should be escalated to external authorities.

5. Reporting Mechanisms

Develop Multiple Reporting Channels ☐

Offer various confidential reporting channels (e.g., online forms, hotlines, email) to ensure accessibility and anonymity for individuals reporting concerns.

Create Guidelines for Handling Reports ☐

Document procedures for handling reports, including acknowledgment, initial assessment, and escalation processes.

Maintain Confidentiality and Support ☐

Emphasize confidentiality in handling reports and provide support resources for those involved, including counseling or referral services if necessary.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Conduct Periodic Policy Reviews ☐

Schedule regular reviews (e.g., annually) to assess the effectiveness of the safeguarding policy and make updates based on feedback, incident trends, and new research.

Track Incident Reports and Outcomes ☐

Maintain records of reported incidents, actions taken, and resolutions, analyzing data to identify patterns and areas for policy improvement.

Gather Feedback from Stakeholders ☐

Collect feedback from athletes, coaches, parents, and staff on the safeguarding policy's effectiveness and accessibility to identify any barriers to reporting or areas for improvement.

Benchmark Against Industry Standards ☐

Regularly compare the safeguarding policy against national and international standards, adapting it as necessary to remain current with best practices.

7. Accountability and Compliance

Establish Accountability Measures ☐

Set up mechanisms to monitor compliance with safeguarding policies, such as spot checks, audits, or regular reporting requirements for coaches and staff.

Include Safeguarding in Performance Reviews ☐

Integrate safeguarding performance as a criterion in staff and coach evaluations to emphasize its importance in day-to-day operations.

Set Clear Consequences for Non-Compliance ☐

Communicate the consequences of failing to comply with safeguarding policies, ensuring all members understand that violations will lead to disciplinary actions.

8. Continuous Improvement

Stay Informed on Emerging Issues ☐

Keep up to date with trends in safeguarding, mental health, and athlete welfare to address emerging challenges in the sports environment.

Encourage a Culture of Feedback ☐

Promote a culture that encourages feedback from all members, helping the organization continuously refine and improve safeguarding measures.

Adapt Policies Based on Evaluation Results ☐

Use insights from evaluations, feedback, and incident reports to make data-driven adjustments to safeguarding policies, promoting ongoing policy development.

Celebrate Successes and Recognize Compliance ☐

Acknowledge and celebrate adherence to safeguarding standards and recognize the efforts of individuals who contribute to creating a safe, respectful environment.

This checklist serves as a guide for implementing comprehensive safeguarding policies in sports organizations. By following these steps, organizations can ensure that their policies are effective, accessible, and integrated into the culture of safety and respect within their sports community.

9.4 Relevant Legal Frameworks and Regulations

This list of legal frameworks and regulations provides guidance for sports organizations on safeguarding, athlete welfare, and Safeguarding against abuse, discrimination, and harassment. These frameworks are widely recognized and available online, offering sports organizations a foundation for compliance with national and international standards in safeguarding.

International Frameworks and Regulations

1. **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**
 - o *Website* <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>
 - o *Description* Adopted by most UN member states, the UNCRC outlines the rights of children to Safeguarding from all forms of abuse and exploitation, mandating specific rights that sports organizations should consider in child safeguarding policies.
2. **Council of Europe Convention on the Safeguarding of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention)**
 - o *Website* coe.int/en/web/children/lanzarote-convention
 - o *Description* This convention sets legal standards across Europe to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse. It encourages reporting

mechanisms and emphasizes preventive measures, particularly in environments involving children, such as sports.

3. International Labour Organization (ILO) Guidelines on Protecting Young Workers

- o Website <https://www.ilo.org>
- o *Description* The ILO provides guidelines to protect young people in the workplace, including sports settings, with a focus on safeguarding against exploitation, abuse, and unsafe working conditions.

4. International Olympic Committee (IOC) – Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport

- o Website <https://www.olympics.com/en/news/safe-sport-how-yog-athletes-are-learning-to-protect-themselves-from-harassment-a>
- o *Description* The IOC's safeguarding framework and toolkit offer comprehensive guidelines for preventing abuse and harassment in sports. The IOC promotes international standards for the Safeguarding of athletes across all levels.

European Frameworks and Regulations

1. European Union General Data Safeguarding Regulation (GDPR)

- o Website <https://gdpr.eu>
- o *Description* GDPR emphasizes data privacy, including the handling of minors' data, relevant to safeguarding personal information of athletes in sports organizations. Compliance with GDPR is essential for any organization collecting and managing personal data in Europe.

2. European Sports Charter (Council of Europe)

- o Website <https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/the-european-sports-charter>
- o *Description* The European Sports Charter provides a framework for sports policy in Europe, emphasizing the Safeguarding of young athletes and advocating for sports organizations to ensure safe, inclusive environments.

3. EU Work Plan for Sport (2024–2027)

- o Website <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/news/adoption-of-new-eu-work-plan-for-sport-2024-2027>
- o *Description* The EU Work Plan for Sport outlines the EU's priorities, including safeguarding, gender equality, and the fight against violence in sports. The work plan includes specific objectives for promoting athlete safety and well-being in member states.

4. Council of Europe – Start to Talk Campaign

- o Website coe.int/en/web/sport/start-to-talk
- o *Description* This Council of Europe initiative encourages athletes, coaches, and sports organizations to "start to talk" about abuse prevention in sports. It offers resources and guidelines aimed at preventing child abuse and safeguarding minors in sports settings.

National Frameworks and Regulations

United Kingdom

1. **Children Act 1989 & 2004**
 - o *Website* legislation.gov.uk
 - o *Description* This UK legislation establishes the legal framework for child Safeguarding, mandating that organizations, including sports bodies, prioritize the welfare and safeguarding of children.
2. **UK Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006**
 - o *Website* legislation.gov.uk
 - o *Description* This act provides for the Safeguarding of vulnerable groups, including young athletes, in sports. It outlines requirements for background checks and sets conditions for safe interactions between adults and minors.
3. **Sport England Safeguarding Standards**
 - o *Website* sportengland.org
 - o *Description* Sport England provides specific safeguarding standards for sports organizations in the UK, offering guidelines for protecting minors and vulnerable adults in sports settings.

France

1. **Code du Sport (Sports Code)**
 - o *Website* legifrance.gouv.fr
 - o *Description* The French Sports Code includes sections on child Safeguarding, safety standards, and anti-doping regulations. It mandates sports organizations to follow safeguarding measures to protect young athletes.
2. **Loi Schiappa (Law Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence)**
 - o *Website* legifrance.gouv.fr
 - o *Description* This French law, focusing on preventing gender-based violence, impacts sports organizations by mandating protocols for handling harassment and abuse, with specific guidelines for protecting minors.

Germany

1. **Child and Youth Welfare Act (SGB VIII)**
 - o *Website* gesetze-im-internet.de
 - o *Description* This act establishes Safeguarding for children and youth in Germany, requiring organizations, including sports clubs, to report and address cases of abuse or endangerment involving minors.
2. **German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB) – Safe Sport Program**
 - o *Website* dosb.de

- o *Description* DOSB's Safe Sport Program offers resources and guidelines on safeguarding and preventing abuse within German sports organizations, ensuring they align with national standards.

Netherlands

1. **Dutch Youth Safeguarding Act**
 - o *Website* rijksoverheid.nl
 - o *Description* This legislation provides a framework for safeguarding children and young adults in various environments, including sports. It includes mandates for child Safeguarding and safe practices within youth sports programs.

Ireland

1. **Children First Act 2015**
 - o *Website* <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/d1b594-children-first/>
 - o *Description* This act outlines child Safeguarding guidelines in Ireland, including requirements for mandatory reporting and safeguarding protocols within sports organizations.
2. **Sport Ireland – Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children in Athletics**
 - o *Website* sportireland.ie
 - o *Description* Sport Ireland provides a Code of Ethics and Good Practice to promote safe and fair sports environments, with detailed safeguarding protocols for children's sports.

These frameworks and regulations provide essential legal guidance for sports organizations to create safe, inclusive, and responsible environments for athletes and participants. By referencing these standards, sports organizations can ensure compliance and uphold best practices in safeguarding across various national and international jurisdictions.

Additional Resources for Education and Training on Safeguarding in Sports

This list provides accessible, online resources for education and training on safeguarding, athlete welfare, and abuse prevention in sports. These resources are valuable for sports organizations, coaches, athletes, parents, and administrators seeking guidance on creating safe and supportive environments.

9.5 Educational Resources and Online Training Programs

1. NSPCC Child Safeguarding in Sport Unit (CPSU) – Training Courses

- o Website <https://thecpsu.org.uk/sport-safeguarding-training#cpsu-training-offer>
- o *Description* The CPSU offers a range of online courses on child Safeguarding, safeguarding policies, and managing safeguarding concerns in sports settings. Courses are suitable for coaches, volunteers, and sports administrators.
- 2. **Sport Ireland – Safeguarding Training for Coaches and Volunteers**
 - o Website <https://www.sportireland.ie/ethics/safeguarding-training>
 - o *Description* Sport Ireland offers safeguarding training workshops, including introductory, advanced, and specialized courses for those working with young athletes. Online materials include guidance on recognizing abuse, reporting procedures, and creating a safe sports environment.
- 3. **Play by the Rules (Australia) – Free Online Courses**
 - o Website <https://playbytherules.net.au/online-courses>
 - o *Description* Play by the Rules provides free online courses on child Safeguarding, discrimination, harassment, and inclusive practices in sports. Courses are designed for all levels within sports organizations, from beginners to advanced staff.
- 4. **Safe Sport International (SSI) – Webinars and Workshops**
 - o Website <https://www.safesportinternational.com/courses-and-resources/>
 - o *Description* SSI offers regular webinars, workshops, and downloadable resources focused on safe sport practices globally. Topics cover preventing abuse, creating safer sports environments, and implementing effective safeguarding policies.

Specialized Resources for Coaches and Parents

1. **True Sport – Resources for Parents and Coaches**
 - o Website <https://truesport.org/resources/>
 - o *Description* True Sport provides resources for parents and coaches to promote ethical behavior, respect, and inclusion in sports. Guides cover integrity, abuse prevention, and fostering positive sportsmanship.
2. **Parents Protect! – Safeguarding Resources for Parents in Sports**
 - o Website parentsprotect.co.uk
 - o *Description* This UK-based resource offers parents guidance on identifying risks in sports environments, discussing boundaries with children, and understanding sports safeguarding protocols.
3. **Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) – Athlete Safety Resources**
 - o Website positivecoach.org
 - o *Description* PCA provides resources and workshops for coaches and parents on fostering safe, positive sports environments. Topics include preventing abuse, promoting respect, and supporting athlete mental health.
4. **Stop It Now! – Online Resources for Preventing Abuse in Sports**

- o Website stopitnow.org
- o *Description* Stop It Now! provides resources and guidance on preventing sexual abuse, specifically tailored for parents, coaches, and sports organizations.

These resources offer comprehensive guidance, tools, and online training opportunities for safeguarding in sports. By leveraging these educational materials, sports organizations can develop effective safeguarding policies, promote safe practices, and support the well-being of all athletes and staff involved.



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RISE HANDBOOK

HOW TO CREATE A SAFE SPORT ENVIRONMENT WHICH VALUES ATHLETES AS HUMAN BEINGS



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